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## *The Nature of Social Change in Rural Gujarat: The Kheda District, 1818–1918*

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THE Kheda (or Kaira) district has lately attracted great interest among Indian historians,<sup>1</sup> not only because it was the area in which Gandhi chose to launch the very first peasant ‘satyagraha’ in resistance to government revenue demands, but also because it harboured a highly progressive class of peasant farmers, known as the Patidars, who to this day rank among the wealthiest cultivators in Western India.

Stimulated by David Pocock’s detailed anthropological study of the Patidars<sup>2</sup> one of the most controversial of recent writers has been David Hardiman,<sup>3</sup> who concentrated his study on the highly fertile ‘Charotar’ tract encompassing the Nadiad, Borsad, and Anand talukas of the district as well as the Petlad subdivision of the Gaikwad’s Baroda state, but who has since<sup>4</sup> given his conclusions a much wider and more far-reaching application. In particular his theory that it was the ‘middle peasantry’<sup>5</sup> who formed the mainspring behind the development of

Thanks are due to Stuart Corbridge and Gerry Kearns and to the late Professor Eric Stokes, whose inspiration and guidance will be missed by a whole generation, and but for whom my own researches would never have commenced.

<sup>1</sup> E.g. J. Brown, *Gandhi’s rise to power* (Cambridge, 1972), pp. 83–111. I follow D. Hardiman here by wherever possible using the more accurate transliteration ‘Kheda’ rather than the anglicized ‘Kaira’.

<sup>2</sup> D. Pocock, *Kanbi and Patidar, a Study of the Patidar Community of Gujarat* (O.U.P., 1972), and *Mind, Body and Wealth, A Study of Belief and Practice in an Indian Village* (Oxford, 1973).

<sup>3</sup> D. Hardiman, ‘Peasant Agitations in Kheda District, Gujarat, 1917–34’ (Sussex D.Phil., 1975); and ‘The Crisis of the Lesser Patidars: Peasant Agitations in Kheda District, Gujarat, 1917–34’, in D. A. Low (ed.), *Congress and the Raj* (Heinemann: London, 1977).

<sup>4</sup> D. Hardiman, ‘Politicisation and Agitation among the Dominant Peasants in Early Twentieth Century India’, *Economic and Political Weekly*, IX (28 February 1976). I am heavily indebted to the stimulating contributions to the subject made by both of the above-mentioned authors.

<sup>5</sup> For the origin of these terms see V. I. Lenin, *To the Rural Poor*, in *Collected Works*, Vol. 6 (Lawrence and Wishart: London, 1961), pp. 361–430, and Mao Tse-Tung, *How to Analyse the Classes in the Rural Areas*, *Report of an Investigation into the Peasants Movement in Hunan*, and *The Chinese Revolution and the Chinese Communist Party*, in *Selected Works*

'peasant nationalism' in India in the early twentieth century deserves re-consideration. However, the main emphasis throughout this paper is on the analysis of Kheda society in the nineteenth century and the early years of the twentieth. In our attempt to establish a fresh perspective on the divisions among the Kheda peasantry in this period much of the earlier sections are, of necessity, highly descriptive. Nevertheless, from this there should emerge a clear picture of the evolutions within the society and, in particular, the changing fortunes of the 'superior Patidar' élite of the district.

As a result of the conservative British approach to the settlement of the shareholding *nurwa* villages of the Charotar, quasi-feudal stratifications persisted and, once the old aristocracy of office had fallen into desuetude, the 'superior Patidars' managed to find new ways to prosper and to exploit the lower castes. Eventually, however, the levelling effects of economic development and of changes within the caste hierarchy resulted in this élite being overtaken by a rising group of relatively prosperous cash-cropping, owner-cultivators who came to dominate the economy in the years following the 1899-1900 famine, which had irreparably undermined the outstanding vestiges of privilege within the district. Ultimately the title of 'Patidar' was so devalued that it was claimed by all of the Kanbi cultivators of Kheda. The involvement of these cultivators in the nationalist politics of the inter-war years is not likely, therefore, to have arisen out of 'frustrations' created by the turn-of-the-century depression, as the 'middle peasant' explanation of agrarian political movements would have us argue, but rather the longer-term accomplishments of the owner-cultivating peasants within the district, who developed a form of local communalism in defence of their newly-won status. Leading on from this conclusion it is then finally argued that the re-appraisal of the social basis of political agitations can only be obfuscated by deterministic perceptions of social structure, particularly at this level of generalization, and that the nature of the evolutions within Kheda society owed as much to the ideals of the old aristocracy of the district as to economic relations *per se*. In other words it is maintained that, despite the rationalization of social relations seen throughout Gujarat in the late nineteenth century, objectively-defined class divisions cannot directly account for hierarchical and political changes within a peasant society. As befits such a critical approach, we begin our study with the very first years of British rule in Gujarat.

(Lawrence & Wishart, 1954), Vol. 1, pp. 138-40, and 21-59, and Vol. 3, pp. 72-101 (pp. 92-3ff). For the progenitor of much modern debate see Hamza Alavi, *Peasants and Revolution* in the *Socialist Register* for 1965 (Merlin Press: London), pp. 241-77.

### Early British Administration

Owing to the exactions of the Marathas, petty chiefs and marauding bands of Chuwalia Kolis, Bhils and other tribesmen of the *kaliparaj* (the dark-skinned lower castes) the ceded territories that comprised British Gujarat in the early nineteenth century were in an appalling state of disorder, 'very reminiscent of Medieval Europe after the fall of Rome'.<sup>6</sup> The Marathas had divided the country into settled, peaceful (*rasti*) villages and the troubled (*mehwasi*) villages. The former were administered by a hierarchy of officials appointed chiefly from among the dominant caste. At the district level the *komavisdar* was responsible for the administration of justice and the collection of land revenue, while below him a *desai* (equivalent to the Maharashtran *deshmukh*) was appointed responsible for each particular taluka. He was in turn assisted by the *amin* and the *majmudar* (who superintended the village accounts), and finally the village accountant (*talati*) and the headman or *patel* who had similar responsibilities as the *komavisdar* but at the village level.<sup>7</sup>

Mr Diggle (collector for Kheda in 1805) and the other collectors appointed to each of the districts inherited this system and also maintained an armed force (as the Marathas had done)—often necessary to exact annual tribute from the turbulent *mehwasi* villages.<sup>8</sup>

Each of the officials had accumulated status, power and estates in varying degrees according to their ability to extract wealth from the cultivating classes below them in the rural hierarchy.<sup>9</sup> Thus when the British began to interfere after 1815 in the system of revenue management they also began to re-order the structure of agrarian society. Mr Diggles' first step in this direction was to put a check on the Rajput *girasis*, 'superior landholders' (often exclusively by rights of arms),<sup>10</sup>

<sup>6</sup> R. D. Choksey, *Economic Life in the Bombay Gujarat, 1800–1939* (Asia Publishing House, New York, 1968), p. 14.

<sup>7</sup> These officials remained powerful and wealthy individuals even though sometimes absent from the district or circumvented. See *Gazetteer of the Bombay Presidency, vol. III, Kaira & Panch Mahals* (Bombay, 1879) (hereafter *Kheda Gazetteer*), p. 92.

<sup>8</sup> Bishop R. Heber, *Northern India*, ed. M. A. Laird (Cambridge, 1971), p. 301. The Bishop commented that the lawlessness of the Bhils and Kolis required the magistrates and collectors to have 'a larger force of armed men in their employ than any others of the same rank whom I have met with . . .'. The Ahmedabad district was peculiar in consisting almost entirely of *mehwasi* villages, see *Gazetteer of the Bombay Presidency, vol. IV, Ahmedabad* (Bombay, 1879) (hereafter *Ahmedabad Gazetteer*), p. 146.

<sup>9</sup> *Kheda Gazetteer*, p. 90: 'These sub-divisional officers formed a well-to-do class. Besides their village fees, "dasturis", most of them had, chiefly by taking land in mortgage, acquired considerable estates'.

<sup>10</sup> *Kheda Gazetteer*, pp. 92–3.

who forced their demands on the villages and could take refuge from government, as did the Koli (or 'Baraiya') *dacoits*, in the woods and ravines near the Mahi river. The solution applied between 1811 and 1816 was to commute their claims on the villages into an annual payment from the government treasury on condition of good behaviour, whilst other of their claims were rejected out of hand as illegal and unsubstantiated. A similar policy was followed in Ahmedabad and other districts of Gujarat with a considerable effect which Lely observed:

Since 1814 the relations between proprietors and tenants have greatly changed. I have heard an old Girasia complain bitterly at his loss of position . . . Formerly if a Kanbi, or even a Vania, trimmed his whiskers or tied his turban in martial Rajput fashion . . . he would have had his clothes pretty soon torn off his back and himself probably well kicked. Now one does not know a Vaghri from a Kanbi, or a Kanbi from a Sipahi, and a Dhed may twist his moustachios and swagger about with the sword of a Girasia.<sup>11</sup>

The *desais*, an official class which transformed itself into an hereditary élite, were the next to fall foul of the British administration.<sup>12</sup> The opportunity to cut out these revenue intermediaries came with the revolt of the *desais*, *mujmudars* and *patels* of Nadiad district in 1815 at the introduction of Governor Nepean's policy of appointing government-paid *talatis* to the villages and demanding the compulsory registration of all alienated or rent-free lands. This regulation, characteristically a local initiative, drafted by Byrom Rowles (the Kheda collector) in 1812,<sup>13</sup> attacked the very basis of the wealth of the *desais* and *patels* and their control over the cultivators. The independence and wealth of the *mehwasdars* (independent chiefs) and Rajput *girasias* elsewhere known as 'talukdars' was also seriously undermined by the appointment of government-paid *talatis* to the *mehwasi* villages where they collected the revenue direct from the tenants and gave 20 per cent to the chief. The *talukdars* of Ahmedabad, Broach, and much later those of the Panch Mahals were handled in much the same way as those in Kheda. Regarded as mere leaseholders they were bought out by the government, or, if left in charge of their estates, the enhancement of the government share of the revenue, sub-division and their own improvidence left them weakened and impoverished.<sup>14</sup> It is thus understandable how M. B. Desai could

<sup>11</sup> *Ahmedabad Gazetteer*, p. 151.

<sup>12</sup> N. Rabitoy, 'System v. Expediency: The Reality of Land Revenue Administration in Bombay Presidency, 1812-20', *Modern Asian Studies*, 9, 4, pp. 531-6.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 537.

<sup>14</sup> Though briefly restored in the late '60s, '70s and early '80s, most *talukdars* and *mehwasdars* effectively lost their proprietary rights and were only maintained with government assistance, viz, Bombay Act VI of 1862.

come across the case of one *taluqdar*, some decades later, who had been reduced to eking out his existence as a mere bus driver.<sup>15</sup>

An attempt was made to resist these changes when, under the *desais'* influence, the Nadiad headmen refused to collect the revenue—rather as the introduction of the Survey was resisted in Khandesh to the south. But four of the Nadiad *desais* were slapped in jail and fined £1,000 each for their trouble, and the opportunity then taken to introduce an *amani* or *ryotwari* settlement in the taluka.

The Bhats of Matar taluka, a sacred caste of Brahmans employed as securities for the payment of the revenue demand, also refused to allow their lands to be surveyed; nevertheless the collector, Archibald Robinson, carried through government policy by force. Though this action had later to be reversed, Robinson deprived all Bhats within his jurisdiction of their employment as securities for the government.<sup>16</sup> Similarly, the Gujarati *sarrafs*, or urban bankers, lost their position as securities as the British administration determined to put the responsibility for payments of revenue on the village headmen. *Komavisdars*, too, were either dismissed or demoted to the role of mere revenue managers.

At the same time the economy of Gujarat was slipping back into depression. The famine of 1813–14 in Kathiawar and North Gujarat, initially brought some wealth into the Kheda district, but then prices began to fall and an enhancement of the revenue in 1819 could not be sustained. The period of the first survey of the Kheda district (1820–26), when each of the *khalsa* (government) villages was re-assessed by a *talati* and the village council (*panchayat*), coincided with a continual fall in grain prices.<sup>17</sup> Captain Prescott attributed much of the severity of this depression to the government's campaign against the *patels*, formerly leading figures in the village economy.<sup>18</sup> Between 1838 and 1848 prices

<sup>15</sup> M. B. Desai, *The Rural Economy of Gujarat* (O.U.P. India, 1948), p. 99.

<sup>16</sup> Byrom Rowles described the Bhats as 'the medium through which every transaction whether just, or unjust, was forced to be conducted . . . they had acquired all the power of government'. But Neil Rabinoy concludes that after 1816, 'The Bhats suffered a greater loss of influence than any other class in Gujarat society during the first twenty years of British rule'. See N. Rabinoy, 'Administrative Modernisation and the Bhats of British Gujarat, 1800–1820', *Indian Economic and Social History Review* (hereafter *I.E.S.H.R.*), vol. IX, no. 1 (March 1974), p. 46.

<sup>17</sup> By 1831–32 grain prices were less than half the average money value, necessitating widespread remissions of revenue over Gujarat.

<sup>18</sup> *Correspondence Relating to the Introduction of the Revenue Survey Assessment in the Kaira Collectorate of the Province of Gujarat* (Bombay, 1869) (hereafter *Correspondence*), p. 159 (no. 418 of 25.11.1865): 'Mr Mill's Jumabundy reports for 1832–34 give a most dismal account of the state of the ryots and revenue in some parts of the Kaira collectorate. I must confess that I attribute this sudden change in part to the influence of the patels, who

steadied and rates were kept moderate, but depression struck again with prices recovering only in 1857, and the situation was much worse in other of the Gujarati districts.

### The Patidars

In these difficult times an island of stability and relative prosperity was to be found in the *nurwa* villages of Kheda district. During the troubled period of Maratha rule their lands had been exceptional in bearing a saleable value.<sup>19</sup> Now, covering a mere one-sixth of the area of government land in the early 1850s, they accounted for a full quarter of the rental of the district.<sup>20</sup> Established in Mughal times as an extension of the revenue bureaucracy, the tenure became 'an "institution" inseparably connected with the status and social position of the richest and most thriving agriculturists in Gujarat'.<sup>21</sup> The shareholders in these coparcenaries, known as *nurwadars*,<sup>22</sup> were the most influential peasants in the district and had organized themselves into the 'Patidar' sub-caste (*jati*) in order to legitimize their authority.

The cultivating caste of Kanbis, distributed over much of North-West India, was divided into four major divisions: Lewa, Kadva, Anjana, and Matia. The Anjana and Kadva Kanbis were most heavily concentrated in North Gujarat, and the Matia Kanbis in the Jalalpur and Bardoli talukas of Surat district.<sup>23</sup> But the Lewa sub-section, the most prestigious, was 'dominant'<sup>24</sup> in the Charotar, accounting for nearly a third of the population, and it was the élite of their numbers who constituted the Patidar sub-caste. Their unique organization enabled the *nurwa* (sharehold) villages of Kheda and the similar *bhagdaree* villages of Broach<sup>25</sup> to withstand the Maratha tax-farming system and the predations of petty chiefs, whereas in Surat district the *desais* had managed to oust and

had lately been deprived (by the abandonment, in a great measure, of the system of leasing) of profits which had been theirs almost hereditarily from time immemorial'.

<sup>19</sup> *Correspondence*, p. 13 (W. G. Pedder's no. 11 of 21.3.1862).

<sup>20</sup> *Kheda Gazetteer*, p. 105.

<sup>21</sup> Capt. C. J. Prescott, Gujarat revenue survey superintendent, *Correspondence*, p. 1 (no. 99 of 25.3.1862).

<sup>22</sup> Hardiman refers to them as *patidars* with small 'p'.

<sup>23</sup> *Gazetteer of the Bombay Presidency*, vol. IX, pt I, *Gujarat Population, Hindus* (Bombay, 1901), p. 154.

<sup>24</sup> See L. Dumont, *Homo Hierarchicus* (Weidenfeld & Nicholson: London, 1970), p. 161.

<sup>25</sup> *Gazetteer of the Bombay Presidency*, vol. II, *Surat & Broach* (Bombay, 1877) (hereafter *Surat & Broach Gazetteer*), p. 372.



replace the old *patels* and to impose heavily on the village incomes.<sup>26</sup> Out of the two-hundred odd Charotar villages under British rule, eight were organized as *nurwa* villages, thirty-seven were *inami* (revenue-free) estates and the remainder were *ryotwari*. Each of the *khadki* (families) which originally formed a *nurwa* village held a share of the village lands while the *mujmoon* common lands were held jointly and rented out. The government revenue demand was paid primarily from the profits on the *mujmoon* land and then any remaining deficit by an apportionment paid by each *nurwadar* in each *khadki* in proportion to his original share of the village lands. Thus the main burden of a heavy revenue demand could be thrown on to the backs of inferior tenant cultivators. The principal shareholders in each *khadki* were known as the *matadars* (literally the 'signers') and were registered as responsible for the collection of government revenue. They formed an oligarchy ruling the village, their powers confirmed by Mountstuart Elphinstone in 1821, and the *patel*, as such, was simply the eldest *matadar* on each village council.<sup>27</sup> Their powers were extensive as, for instance, in police matters 'the police patel generally worked through the sharers' and in villages such as Chuklasi and Kambaluj the *nurwadars* were able effectively to bribe and obstruct the government *talatis*.<sup>28</sup>

The 'tenants-at-will' of the Patidar shareholders were largely of the subordinate Koli caste, and the customary tenants (virtually self-cultivating occupants) were either Lewa Kanbis or common 'lesser' Patidars. Though a Lewa Kanbi might become a shareholder he would only reluctantly be admitted to the status of a Patidar<sup>29</sup> and, vice versa, an impecunious, landless Patidar would only gradually lose his status. Hence there not only evolved a distinction between Kanbis and Patidars but also between the well-to-do, 'superior' Patidars who could claim descent from the original proprietors, usually the dominant Patidars in each village and those living in the more established and wealthiest Charotar villages, and the 'lesser' Patidars who might even have been forced by their low rank to intermarry with ordinary Lewa Kanbi families. Cruikshank wrote of this:

The Pateedar will not give his daughter in marriage to an ordinary Koonbee

<sup>26</sup> *Correspondence*, pp. 9-10 (no. 11 of 21.3.1862). A good example of the third stage in the 'developmental cycle' of the Raj as outlined by R. G. Fox in *Kin, Clan, Raja and Rule: State-hinterland Relations in Pre-industrial India* (Berkeley, 1971), p. 97.

<sup>27</sup> *Gazetteer of the Bombay Presidency*, vol. IX, pt I (Bombay, 1901), p. 163.

<sup>28</sup> *Ahmedabad Gazetteer*, p. 158; and *Correspondence*, pp. 27 and 35 (no. 11 of 21.3.1862).

<sup>29</sup> Lewa Kanbis who had risen to the status of shareholders were distinguished, for example, by the title of 'gazeepoora' in the village of Ore [Od]. *Correspondence*, pp. 34 and 524 (no. 11 of 21.3.1862 and no. 3 of 11.4.1863).

and will only receive a daughter of that class in consideration of a handsome dowry; indeed, he loses character by the connection, and it is therefore avoided by all who pride themselves in pure descent. The Pateedars are very tenacious of their rights, and argue the propriety of the Koonbees being kept in subjection to them, as one link in the chain of society lower than themselves.<sup>30</sup>

These superior Patidars, as I seek to define them, were a broadly kin-based status group, not a distinct sub-caste as the Patidars as a whole still claimed to be. Their heterogeneous composition included pure landholders, as well as those whose status merely derived from their former association with public office. There was, however, no sharp division between these superior *kulia* (aristocratic) Patidars and the lesser *akulia* (non-aristocratic) Patidars and the ordinary Lewa Kanbis,<sup>31</sup> as each individual's position was purely relative to those immediately above and below him in the hierarchy. David Hardiman, however, describes the superior Patidars<sup>32</sup> as being only those resident in seven villages considered to be of the highest standing: Nadiad, Vaso, Sojitra, Dharmaj, Karamsad, Virsad and Bhadnan,<sup>33</sup> though at another moments he seems to be distinguishing between lesser and superior Patidars purely in economic and cultural rather than spatial terms.<sup>34</sup> The first two definitions are compatible but not together with the latter if, as he suggests, status and wealth are closely entwined and if both rich and poor Patidars are to be found in all the villages of Kheda. Hardiman employs the category of 'the seven villages' because in recent times the Patidar inhabitants adopted the custom of attempting to marry exclusively among themselves (a phenomenon referred to later), but by doing so he excludes many other high ranking villagers from his argument<sup>35</sup> and degrades the nineteenth-century distinction between superior and lesser Patidars and ordinary Kanbis, as originally

<sup>30</sup> Capt. J. Cruikshank, *Reports on the Portions of the Dholka Purgunna in the Ahmedabad and Kaira Collectories and on the Mehmooodabad & Nureead Purgannas & on the Oomret & Bhaluj Tuppas in the Kaira Collectory* (Bombay, 1853) (hereafter *Reports*), p. 111.

<sup>31</sup> Cruikshank describes this distinction as 'broadly drawn', *Reports*, p. 97.

<sup>32</sup> Hardiman refers to 'superior and lesser Kanbis' up to 1900 and to 'superior and lesser Patidars' thereafter. This obfuscates the division between the lesser Patidars and the ordinary Kanbis (the erosion of which is of crucial importance) and also, I believe, incorrectly suggests that a qualitative re-structuring of the social hierarchy was completed before the end of the nineteenth century.

<sup>33</sup> Hardiman, 'The Crisis of the Lesser Patidars' (1977), pp. 48-9, and 'Peasant Agitations' (1975), p. 42; here the author also admits that stratification among the Patidars did not in practice work as he has described it.

<sup>34</sup> E.g. 'Peasant Agitations' (1975), p. 40.

<sup>35</sup> For example, an *ekada* (marriage circle) formed by the Patidars in 91 villages in the Charotar in 1863 states their determination not to give girls in marriage to 'the 13 most honourable villages as formerly' according to H. R. Cooke, *Report on the Repression of Female Infanticide in the Bombay Presidency* (Bombay, 1875), p. 40, and Cooke himself makes

described by David Pocock.<sup>36</sup> Hardiman's simplification of the divisions among the Kheda peasantry, while improving the continuity of his narrative, at the same time prevents his giving adequate consideration to the role of status conflicts, which were only indirect representations of the social relations of production, but which nevertheless remain the operational basis behind much of the available evidence. One might go so far as to argue that any 'essentialist' social analysis which glosses over the functioning of this structural system will inevitably encounter severe problems of definition.

Originally the secession of the Patidar sub-caste had been a consequence of fierce competition within the rural hierarchy and as this continued, and the old qualifications for entry into this élite were devalued, the superior Patidars reacted by struggling to preserve their position and in the process, as I shall argue, irrevocably undermined their social standing, eventually enabling even ordinary Lewa Kanbis to claim the status of Patidars.<sup>37</sup> The nature of this 'Patidar' status is, however, a highly complex and evolving subject, as I shall subsequently seek to illustrate.

### Survey and Settlement

As the old administrative superstructure was slowly dismantled by the British the dominance of the Patidars was relatively enhanced.<sup>38</sup> Their houses at this time were 'spacious and substantial'<sup>39</sup> and their comparative affluence is shown by the fact that whilst the more backward Kheda talukas were floundering in depression the Charotar talukas of Neriad and Borsad began recovering, with the area under cultivation expanding, five years before the upturn in prices in 1857.<sup>40</sup> In the former particularly, the increase in resources far outstripped the growth in poorer talukas, such that by 1865 96 per cent of the cultivable area was frequent references to the '13 *kulia* villages of highest rank', while Pocock, *Kanbi and Patidar*, p. 61, refers to a top 16 villages.

<sup>36</sup> Pocock, *Kanbi and Patidar*, ch. II, pp. 60ff.

<sup>37</sup> As the Patidars were in the nature of a decaying sub-caste in this period I use the terms 'status' and 'standing' interchangeably.

<sup>38</sup> The removal of the *desais* and the subordination of the *patels* was quite literally a weight off the shoulders of the *nurwadars*. See the history of the village of Tranja (Matar taluka), *Correspondence*, p. 517 (no. 3 of 11.4.1863).

<sup>39</sup> Cruikshank, *Reports*, p. 91.

<sup>40</sup> *Correspondence*, pp. 180-1 and 250-1 (no. 418 of 25.11.1865 & Rev. Dept. no. 1408 of 6.4.1868). That any progress is observable in Borsad at all is impressive, considering how ruinous was the lease under which it was managed in the 'thirties and 'forties (*Kheda Gazetteer*, p. 104) necessitating large scale remissions which by the 'fifties had become almost nominal.

declared to be under the plough, whilst in Kapadvanj, out of 43,000 cultivable acres, 18,700 were left waste in spite of the reportedly dense population in the villages. The rates which Captain Robertson's *pan-chayats* imposed in the 'twenties and 'thirties had been heavily biased against the richer cultivators who were considered most able to pay. Thasra taluka in the north-east of the district, in particular, had suffered heavy caste rates, with cultivators deserting the villages and the inferior soils, causing the Muslim *mulleks* there (holders of land granted for military service four centuries previously but now co-sharers in the revenue with the government), to lower the rates simply to check the decline in cultivation.<sup>41</sup> In Nadiad, however, where the rates had been most unequal, their removal had a particularly stimulating effect especially as the change was achieved by lowering the higher rather than raising the lower rates.<sup>42</sup> Thus after the early 1850s the most prosperous villages were always to be found under the *nurwa* tenure.<sup>43</sup>

By the time the Revenue Survey of the Deccan was transferred to Gujarat in the 1850s and early 'sixties revenue officials were generally agreed in rejecting the progressive form of revenue demand adopted by the Marathas and early British administrators in favour of a regressive system. As W. G. Pedder commented: '... at such a pitch the profits of superior husbandry are of course much larger than the bare remuneration of unskilled cultivation, but that this should be the case, is one of the great objects of the Survey system.'<sup>44</sup>

Thus as the revenue system was simplified and regularized, regional and individual inequalities of wealth among the peasant cultivators were encouraged. The fortunes of the proprietary cultivators were mixed however, for, whilst the *mulleks* of Thasra taluka were sorely abused by the new Survey, and, as I have mentioned, other landowners had been crushed by the administration, the *nurwadars* of the Charotar were treated comparatively generously.<sup>45</sup> Generally the motives of

<sup>41</sup> This they did willingly, however, as their share was fixed at Rs 1-5-10 per *beegah*—*Correspondence*, pp. 342-55 (no. 24 of 11.11.1864).

<sup>42</sup> *Correspondence*, p. 182 (Rev. Dept. no. 4580 of 23.12.1865).

<sup>43</sup> *Correspondence*, p. 151 (no. 418 of 25.11.1865). The Survey was introduced as early as 1851 in the Dholka taluka of Ahmedabad on the lines laid down by Wingate and Goldsmid. Also see R. Kumar, 'The Rise of the Rich Peasants in Western India', D. A. Low (ed.), *Soundings in Modern South Asian History* (London, 1968), pp. 25-8.

<sup>44</sup> The *mulleks* declared that Survey and Assessment would ruin them financially and socially, and N. B. Beyts, the Settlement Officer, found them 'exceedingly sensitive of being elbowed out of the management of their villages...'. *Correspondence*, pp. 402-7 (no. 268 of 9.7.1867, no. 530 of 24.7.1867, and Rev. Dept. no. 3859 of 9.11.1867).

<sup>45</sup> 'Before the introduction of British rule the village sharers acted as farmers of revenue and as middlemen between government and the husbandmen and in most cases

administrators were political—indicating an awareness of the power and status of the Patidars and the extent to which this depended on their holdings in the coparcenaries. This was clearly a lesson learnt from the 1852 Khandesh survey riots and the 1857 Uprising. George Pedder's advice against ending the *nurwa* tenure illustrates this point:

Of all the villages which I have examined I have not found in one even a majority of the sharers desirous of the introduction of the Survey system, and in nearly all they are unanimous in vehemently deprecating it. Such is the estimation in which the tenure is held by the natives that the coparcenaries fear that they shall lose *abroo* [status] by its destruction, and be unable to marry their sons and daughters as advantageously as they now can do.<sup>46</sup>

A. Rogers said much the same thing too in 1868 as, after having compared his policy to that employed in regard to the *talukdars* of Oudh, he went on to advise against acting 'prejudicially to the interests . . . of a large and influential body of middlemen, such as the *nurwadars* are, especially when the doing so would . . . sacrifice . . . a middle class of small proprietors whom it has been found in other parts of India, and I believe will everywhere be found, most adviseable to uphold'.<sup>47</sup>

The *nurwa* tenure was also extremely profitable to the government,<sup>48</sup> and for this reason as well the superior Patidars were encouraged. For example where a large amount of cultivable waste was assessed in the coparcenary the overall rate of assessment was generally lowered to some extent<sup>49</sup>—thus in Mahuda taluka<sup>50</sup> the assessment was lowered by 2 per cent so that the overall demand was only increased by 10 per

were found to have exacted the most ingenious and crushing taxes. Though, under the Survey settlement, they have lost this uncontrolled power of exaction they have still much influence'. *Gazetteer of the Bombay Presidency*, vol. IX, pt I, p. 166.

<sup>46</sup> *Correspondence*, p. 17 (no. 11 of 21.3.1862). He also advises against abolition for fear of offending Bhats and Brahmins, as in many villages lands have been alienated to them rent free (see p. 515, no. 3, of 11.4.1863). The financial advantages of this arrangement are explained in *Bombay Presidency Annual Land Revenue Administration Proceedings*, 1866, p. 280, para. 6.

<sup>47</sup> *Correspondence*, p. 207 (Rev. Dept. no. 1349A of 31.3.1868). Similar views were also expressed by other officials, see p. 63 (no. 521 of 26.2.1863) and p. 133 (Rev. Dept. no. 2942 of 17.8.1866).

<sup>48</sup> *Correspondence*, p. 59, para. 26 (no. 44 of 1861) and p. 95, para. 5 (Rev. Dept. no. 2481 of 30.6.1864). This was because the demand was always realized in *nurwa* villages without annual deductions for waste as in other villages.

<sup>49</sup> *Correspondence*, p. 95, *op. cit.* Supposedly this was to account for agricultural improvements which were in fact hardly taxed at all: '... the power of the government to levy assessment was checked; not by the ability to pay of those *nurwadars* who had improved their lands but by that of those who had not. This explains the great popularity of the *nurwa* tenure . . .' (*Correspondence*, p. 58, *op. cit.*).

<sup>50</sup> Incorporated in Mehmedabad and Nadiad talukas during boundary changes in 1867.

cent. Where the full assessment was enforced, as for example in Karamsad village in Borsad taluka, the Patidars were allowed to retain unusual privileges, in this case a half share of the gross produce from the cultivators.<sup>51</sup> In Wurode (in the same taluka) the Patidars paid only half the rate paid by cultivators of *mujmoon* (common) land managed, in this case, by government. The large amount of alienated lands contained in the *nurwa* villages (up to one-third of the total) was also generously assessed at one-quarter of the usual rate (the '*4-anna* settlement') and government turned a blind eye when the Patidars cultivated them as they did their other lands.<sup>52</sup>

The government seems to have been reluctant, moreover, to protect the tenants of the patidar shareholders,<sup>53</sup> for although they could no longer raise or lower their tenants' rents at will (this was now fixed by the collector), the principal shareholders still had first claim on the land if other Patidars defaulted on their share of the revenue, and could seize the land of tenants if they failed to pay the customary rent.<sup>54</sup> Furthermore no attempt was made to distinguish between the quality of land held by any shareholder: 'Thus they [i.e. wealthier Patidars] who have Bagayet [irrigated garden] lands will profit more by this arrangement than they who have simple Jerayet [dry-crop] fields in possession.'<sup>55</sup> The arguments of tenants in some cases that they were tenants of the government, and not of the Patidars, were dismissed, and thus the Patidars were invested with totally unwarranted proprietary rights.<sup>56</sup> The situation became such that the shareholders' customary tenants (mostly Kanbis and lesser Patidars) had 'by no means the full rights of survey occupants of fields', there being 'no doubt whatever that if the nurwas were broken up, the nurwadars would claim occupancy rights in all the lands of their villages, and most probably be supported in their claim by the civil courts . . .'<sup>57</sup> The richer the Patidar, therefore, the

<sup>51</sup> *Correspondence*, p. 624 (no. 561 of 21.11.1864) and p. 283 (no. 500A of 13.10.1867).

<sup>52</sup> *Correspondence*, pp. 134-6 (Rev. Dept. no. 1789 of 25.4.1866 and no. 1613 of 2.5.1866). Any attempt to levy the full assessment was considered most ill advised.

<sup>53</sup> *Correspondence*, p. 108 (A. C. Trevor's no. 20 of 18.9.1865): 'The nurwadars might have been directed to lower their demands on these (customary) tenants in a degree proportionate to the decrease in their own assessment. To have done so, however, would, I think, have excited more discontent among the nurwadars than would have been compensated for by the benefits to the tenants'.

<sup>54</sup> Report on the village of Koobudthal. *Correspondence*, p. 53, para. 10 and p. 55, para. 16 (W. G. Pedder's no. 44 of 1861).

<sup>55</sup> Capt. Prescott, *Correspondence*, p. 220-1 (no. 424 of 17.10.1867). See also p. 127, para. 2 (Rev. Dept. no. 2091 of 14.5.1866).

<sup>56</sup> *Correspondence*, p. 59, para. 26 (no. 44 of 1861).

<sup>57</sup> A. Rogers, *Correspondence*, p. 128 (Rev. Dept. no. 2091) and pp. 206-7 (Rev. Dept. no. 1349A of 31.3.1868).

more he benefited from government patronage. For example, it was decided not to attempt a redivision of the lands so as to make it correspond with the share of revenue each sharer had to pay, when it was always the poorer shareholders who tended to mortgage land in hard times whilst continuing to pay the revenue.<sup>58</sup>

Thus although the *matadars* and superior Patidars shared in the trend toward a more egalitarian revenue system under European agency, the revenue settlement did more than might at first be thought to preserve their standing, and the lesser Patidars, the customary Kanbi tenants and the lower caste tenants-at-will were accordingly crystallized in a subordinate rôle. Furthermore, the settlement as a whole was biased against the inferior castes. For example, in poorer talukas where cultivation was not so extensive, the revenue assessment was perversely increased most of all through the incorporation of cultivable waste, which accounted for virtually all of the 38 per cent increase in the net assessment of Kapadvanj taluka in 1862/3;<sup>59</sup> and other formerly privileged landholders, such as the *mulleks* of Thasra taluka, were deprived of their proprietary rights and much of their income.<sup>60</sup> Thus not only did the settlements blatantly favour the Kanbis against the lower castes of Kheda, as David Hardiman states,<sup>61</sup> but also they favoured the wealthy, superior Patidars above all others.

### Land, Status and Marriage

As the British were seen to bestow advantages on the superior Patidars so their status was maintained, which explains the inordinate value which continued to be put on the shareholding right. For this reason the *matadars* were described as 'very jealous of their rights, which gave them a certain position and influence.'<sup>62</sup> We have already referred to Patidars who continued to pay the revenue demand on lands which they had mortgaged or sold, and during the 'fifties and 'sixties this was a common phenomenon. Economically the justification for this was slight as by custom and eventually by law (Bombay Act V of 1862) *nurwa* land could only be sold between shareholders, and a Patidar who threw up his lands in hard times could regain them (for a small compensation) without having to pay the demand on them during the intervening period.

<sup>58</sup> *Correspondence*, p. 96, para. 11 (Rev. Dept. no. 2481 of 30.6.1864).

<sup>59</sup> *Correspondence*, p. 699 (no. 544 of 21.11.1864).

<sup>60</sup> *Correspondence*, pp. 388-9 (no. 361 of 18.10.1865).

<sup>61</sup> Hardiman, 'Peasant Agitations', pp. 55-6.

<sup>62</sup> *Gazetteer of the Bombay Presidency*, vol. IX, pt I, p. 156.

Indeed, just like the *meerasdars*<sup>63</sup> of the Deccan, the Patidar could completely desert his lands only to return and reclaim them many years afterwards. In one case, that of the village of Moholel (Matar taluka), two Patidars deserted their lands during the great famine of 1790–91 but their shares were still shown distinctly in the village accounts as late as 1863, even though the land was cultivated by other *nurwadars*, in case they should one day return.<sup>64</sup> In the village of Koobudthal in Daskroi taluka, Ahmedabad, the Patidars no longer had the right to collect the rent on the *mujmoon* (common) land but for the sake of their *abroo* (status) the Collector still allowed all applications to till land to go through the *nurwadars*.<sup>65</sup> I would surmise that it was also for the sake of their *abroo* that lesser shareholders in the village of Sesodra in the Soopa taluka of Surat district continued to pay their original share of the revenue demand, after mortgaging or selling part of their land.<sup>66</sup> Many lesser Patidars therefore naturally desired an introduction of the Survey System, to which the principal shareholders were vehemently opposed. Consequently, when the surveyor, A. C. Trevor, tried to enter the names of sub-sharers holding more than 2 *annas* into the *ikrarnama* (register of rights) in the village of Wantwali, ‘the disputes of the *nurwadars* were too numerous and violent to render this measure effectual’.<sup>67</sup> Because of the status inherent in shareholding, such that ‘the holder of the minutest portion claims all the privileges of a Pateedar, and takes his place in the village concerns before all other ordinary members of the community’,<sup>68</sup> there was much subdivision. In the wealthy villages of high standing, particularly, there were an above average number of shareholders,<sup>69</sup> such that it became increasingly difficult to tell a wealthy customary Kanbi tenant apart from an inferior Patidar. Thus Capt. C. J. Prescott observed in Matar taluka that ‘very great eagerness was shown by all classes of cultivators to get their names entered as Survey occupants of land . . . and, especially in the case of lands held on the “Khatabundy”

<sup>63</sup> See R. Kumar, *Western India in the 19th Century* (London, 1968).

<sup>64</sup> *Correspondence*, pp. 77–80 (no. 16 of 28.9.1863). Also see p. 54 for an explanation of the terms under which a share can or cannot be reclaimed.

<sup>65</sup> *Correspondence*, p. 54, para. 15 (no. 44 of 1861).

<sup>66</sup> See J. B. Shukla, *Life and Labour in a Gujarat Taluka* (Calcutta, 1937), p. 90; and G. C. Mukhtyar, *Land and Labour in a South Gujarat Village* (Calcutta, 1930), p. 202.

<sup>67</sup> *Correspondence*, p. 118, para. 23 (no. 20 of 18.9.1865). The same ill feeling between the principal *nurwadars*, attempting to confine the privileges of shareholding to themselves, and the lesser *nurwadars* and customary tenants led the latter to challenge the right of the *nurwadars* to raise their rent in the civil courts.

<sup>68</sup> Cruikshank, *Reports*, pp. 75–6.

<sup>69</sup> *Correspondence*, p. 69 (no. 16 of 28.9.1863). Alindra, today the second most prestigious Patidar village, is a typical example.



(Nurwadari) tenure it was often difficult to decide whose name ought to be entered'.<sup>70</sup>

The status inherent in landholding enabled a Patidar to gain two important things: credit and a good marriage for his sons and daughters. The basis for credit was not the land itself but the individual, the security nearly always being personal.<sup>71</sup> Captain Prescott commented on the superior Patidars of Mahuda taluka that 'wherever capital is required they have a great advantage, for their position and the weight their name carries in the district enables them to raise money from the "Soukars" [professional money-lenders] when the Koonbie would have no chance'.<sup>72</sup> The dowries received from the marriage of their sons were equally a source of credit to the high status Patidar, for the Kanbi caste as a whole was peculiar for its hypergamous marriage customs:

Pride of caste and position prevent the Patidars giving their daughters in marriage to any who can possibly be considered inferior in position . . . all the nurwa and Patidaree villages in Kaira have an anna value put upon them, indicative of the social status of the community. All Patidars and Koonbies are therefore striving constantly to marry their daughters into the most aristocratic village, regardless of the age of aspiring bridegrooms.<sup>73</sup>

David Pocock observes that 'vigorous competition for well-born grooms is reported among the Patidars as early as 1857', and within a short while competition among the lesser *akulia* (non-aristocratic) Patidars for the sons of superior, *kulia* Patidars had reached such a pitch that some 'were reduced to poverty by the great sums of money they spent to marry their daughters into high families'.<sup>74</sup> Such dowries could amount to 1,800 or even 3,000 rupees<sup>75</sup> and Pocock came across an exceptional modern example where the dowry amounted to £100,000. Obviously, however, much of the expense of marrying one's daughter to an aristocratic Patidar could be recouped from the dowries the father would receive from those anxious to marry into his newly elevated family. Such social pressures encouraged at least the neglect of female offspring in childhood with the consequence that in Nadiad taluka in 1865 there

<sup>70</sup> Capt. Prescott, *Correspondence*, p. 471 (no. 546 of 21.11.1863). Shukla, *Life and Labour in a Gujarat Taluka*, p. 232, also comments: 'Possession of more land is believed to raise the agriculturist in the estimation of others'.

<sup>71</sup> In Olpad Shukla found that of the small proportion of the total debt that was secured (30%), only 24% was secured on land.

<sup>72</sup> Capt. Prescott, *Correspondence*, p. 601, para. 16 (no. 561 of 5.12.1863).

<sup>73</sup> *Correspondence*, p. 154, para. 42 (no. 418 of 25.11.1865).

<sup>74</sup> Quoted by Pocock, *Kanbi and Patidar*, p. 59.

<sup>75</sup> Cooke, *Repression of Female Infanticide*, p. 86.

were only forty-one women to every fifty-nine men.<sup>76</sup> According to the statistics for the whole of Kheda contained in the 1872 census this disparity between the sexes was generally worst among the inhabitants of the most prestigious Patidari villages, and according to the figures for different age-groups female infanticide was at a peak in the mid 1860s—so that, for example, in Borsad taluka in the mid 'seventies, there were only about fifty-seven girls to every one hundred boys among the six to twelve year olds.<sup>77</sup> The explanation for this lies in the fact that the superior Patidars, benefiting most from the custom, were the slowest to throw over the practice of infanticide under the pressure put on by the authorities, such as Bombay Act VIII of 1870, which enforced the registration of child births and deaths among the Kanbis of Kheda and Ahmedabad districts.<sup>78</sup>

However, this hypergamous marriage situation underlines a fundamental and growing ambiguity in the nature of the Patidar sub-caste. Hypergamy involves an upward mobility of cash and a downward mobility of social values, the importance of descent being over-ridden by a suitably high bride-price. Such mobility is not characteristic between sub-castes and its escalation represented an erosion of the exclusivity of the Patidar *jati*. But the Lewa Kanbis as a whole placed greater emphasis on status than on 'orthodox' caste divisions,<sup>79</sup> hence the old saying in Kheda that a Kanbi cannot be out-casted, as marriage revolved more around status than caste. Consequently the Kanbis cannot be properly related to the traditional *varna* system and each part of the Kheda community characteristically attempted to raise its status by imitation, the Patidars tending to emulate the Vanias.<sup>80</sup> Landholding was a measure of this status, and the communalism which gave rise to

<sup>76</sup> In 1856 Mr Inverarity reported Lewa Kanbis who told him 'that the birth of a daughter is a source of unmitigated grief to them and a calamity second only to the death of a beloved son', quoted in Viswa Nath, 'Female Infanticide and the Lewa Kanbis of Gujarat in the 19th century', *I.E.S.H.R.*, vol. X, no. 4 (December 1973), p. 386.

<sup>77</sup> *Surat and Broach Gazetteer*, p. 373: '25 years ago [A.D. 1852] in villages near Broach, there were not half-a-dozen females in a community mustering hundreds of souls'. However, observers were often ignorant of the custom of Purdah.

<sup>78</sup> Hardiman incorrectly states that in response to a petition from Veridas Ajubhai, Desai of Nadiad, this law was never enacted. If anything the reverse was the case as after the law was introduced (see Cooke, *Repression of Female Infanticide*, p. 19) the only modification, in July 1873, was to restrict its application to the Lewa Kanbis of the two districts who were recognized by government as the worst culprits.

<sup>79</sup> See E. R. Leach, *Aspects of Caste in South India, Ceylon & N/W Pakistan* (Cambridge, 1960), p. 7. Patidars did not intervene in the disputes of lower castes such as the Kolis, and village caste councils were informal and discredited by the rapid rate of change within the caste in the late nineteenth century.

<sup>80</sup> Pocock, *Kanbi and Patidar*, p. 32: 'Jainism and devotional Vaishnavism have been major religions of the Bania [Vania], who . . . provide a model for Patidar emulation'.

the 'caste' claim of the Patidars arose out of the shareholding principle. Thus what distinguished the Patidars from other Kanbis was not based on ritual so much as a hotch-potch of local circumstances. For example, all the Lewa Kanbis were strict vegetarians, but the Patidars could more easily enforce a ban on widow remarriage simply because the hypergamous marriage system caused an excessive number of females to seek an alliance with the superior Patidars, while those at the bottom of the caste would often be forced to take a widow for a wife.<sup>81</sup> The Patidars' greatest weakness however arose out of these very origins. Once their role as part of the administrative hierarchy had been eroded by the British system of revenue management, the superior Patidars could only preserve their status through an increasing reliance on their economic and social advantages. Their privileged descent could only be maintained by a renewed effort at secession by the élite from the bulk of the Lewa Kanbi caste, but at the same time the hypergamous marriage system which defined the élite also eroded it.

The lesser Patidars reacted to the attempted secession of the superior Patidars by forming marriage circles (*ekada* or *gols*) which allowed 'the friction of common kinship combined with heterogeneity in reality'<sup>82</sup> and limited the growing expense of marriages. To the élite however this was not only impossible, as *ekada* suggested an element of exchange in marriages which was considered degrading, but also unprofitable. The resulting tension in the 'sixties and 'seventies was evinced by the rapid growth in the number of *ekada*. Cooke reported in 1875 that 263 out of 451 villages in Kheda had joined one.<sup>83</sup> But even the supposedly endogamous *ekadas* were hypergamously ranked and related, rank declining as the villages were found further south of the Mahi River, or, in the opposite direction from the Charotar, as the villages got nearer and nearer to Saurashtra. All this, therefore, explains why in the late nineteenth century we see the persistence of infanticide, polygamy, and

<sup>81</sup> David Pocock has commented: 'Here, as so often in the study of social hierarchy, we find that the system itself forces people at the lowest levels to engage in behaviour which is then cited as proof of the lowness of the people concerned and hence used to justify the system which represses them'.

<sup>82</sup> Pocock, *Kanbi and Patidar*, p. 162. My interpretation here differs from Pocock as the sources I have consulted suggest that *ekadas* were developed by lesser Patidars in reaction to the secession of *kulia* Patidars—this difference arises because both Pocock and Hardiman describe events in terms of the modern situation where the *kulia/akulia* distinction has been obscured and simply replaced by one between *kulia* Patidars (who can claim descent from nineteenth-century shareholders) and ordinary Patidars (who cannot, i.e. are descended from ordinary Kanbis). Pocock describes the historical distinction on p. 60, but then reverts to modern usage on p. 160. See *Kheda Gazetteer*, pp. 31 ff.

<sup>83</sup> Cooke, *Repression of Female Infanticide*, p. 24.

excessively large dowries, rather than, at the opposite extreme, the simple payment of bride-price which was common among other castes in India.<sup>84</sup>

This implicit challenge to the exclusivity of the Patidar caste might have been coped with but for the more far-reaching consequences of British rule. Though the *nurwadars* were a highly privileged élite, the British now controlled and reaped all the profits from the actual management of revenue and only patronized the wealthier Patidars in the hope that they might come to lead the development of rural agriculture. The stratifications imposed by economic development, however, tend to be horizontal and threaten the traditional barriers between 'castes' such as the Patidars and the Kanbis, thus endangering the position of the very class the British wished to encourage—the superior Patidars.

Economic development and the new proprietary rights conferred by the survey, exacerbated the competition among the Lewa Kanbis for honourable brides and at the same time offered novel means of raising one's status. In the eighteenth century the Muttia Kanbis in the village of Sesodra in Soopa taluka, Surat, could only elevate their status to that of the Bhattela Brahmin shareholders by acts of religious piety.<sup>85</sup> In the nineteenth century, however, status could increasingly be bought with cash which could be used to attract suitable brides for one's children or to acquire land, and by the early 1860s a large number of superior Patidars had removed themselves from cultivation, either hiring labour or leasing their lands to cultivators on written agreements for up to 5 or 10 years,<sup>86</sup> until by 1879 the sharers were described as 'the most thriving class of cultivators, many of them tilling their fields entirely by hired labour',<sup>87</sup> which in some cases migrated seasonally to the Charotar from as far away as Kathiawar. This was characteristic of the Patidar's emulation of the Vania—extensive holdings of fertile soil enabling the superior Patidar and his wife to cultivate prestige crops such as vegetables for their own consumption,<sup>88</sup> and to hire labour or lease out to tenants-at-will so they themselves would not be seen working in the

<sup>84</sup> Viswa Nath, in 'Female Infanticide and the Lewa Kanbis of Gujarat' (*I.E.S.H.R.*, 1973), also reports the greater prevalence of infanticide among high-ranking Patidars, while lower status Kanbis might even have to accept marriage alliances with Kolis. The Kanbis of Ahmedabad and Broach agreed not to intermarry with those of the Charotar but such agreements were soon broken.

<sup>85</sup> *Correspondence*, p. 43 (Pedder's no. 11 of 21.3.1862). The title Muttia derives from *muth*, a monastery.

<sup>86</sup> *Correspondence*, p. 27, *op. cit.*

<sup>87</sup> *Kheda Gazetteer*, p. 109.

<sup>88</sup> *Correspondence*, p. 719 (no. 7 of 24.11.1863).

fields, thereby raising their prestige in the eyes of their fellows.<sup>89</sup> But these advances at the same time undermined the social origins of the superior Patidars' prosperity.

### Late Nineteenth-century Economic Development

Indirect evidence both of the escalating cost of marriages and of the growing importance of cash-crop farming to the Patidars begins to appear in the middle of the nineteenth century. In 1853 seventy-seven of the Patidari villages in the Charotar produced tobacco worth, it was said, something like 2,44,500 rupees;<sup>90</sup> and in 1848 Mr Fawcett, then collector and magistrate of Ahmedabad, noticing signs of depression amongst the Kanbis, attributed this to 'the stricter mode of collecting the land revenue and *the increasingly ruinous expenses attached to marriage*'.<sup>91</sup> Furthermore the Gazetteer refers to the hardships of the Patidars in 1854 when there was a sudden falling off in demand for tobacco, by then 'the chief rent-paying crop'. The abolition of minor privileges and the miserly apportionment of land for the grazing of cattle (two acres for every one hundred cattle), as well as an end to the rewards of office, limited the advantages of the superior Patidars and encouraged them to take a new interest in the business of farming as a means of making profits. Their tenants too benefited from the general incentives given to cash-crop farming from the early 1860s onwards.

Firstly there was the construction of the Bombay-Ahmedabad Railway in 1863, which meant Nadiad was not more than thirteen hours from Bombay and one and a half hours from Ahmedabad, and of the branch lines to Godhra and Cambay via Petlad, built in 1864 and 1891 respectively.<sup>92</sup> More important than the general improvement in communications was the fillip given to production by the general price rise since 1857, stimulated particularly by the cotton boom caused by the American Civil War of 1862-65. In the settlement report of Mahuda taluka (1862/3) it was reported that 'many kinds of agricultural produce are now three times as dear as they were in 1856',<sup>93</sup> and a measure of the response is shown by the fact that the area under tobacco in Nadiad

<sup>89</sup> Cruikshank, *Reports*, p. 111.

<sup>90</sup> Cruikshank, *Reports*, pp. 90-1.

<sup>91</sup> Cooke, *Repression of Female Infanticide*, p. 13. My italics.

<sup>92</sup> *Correspondence*, p. 142 (no. 418 of 25.11.1865).

<sup>93</sup> *Correspondence*, p. 608 (no. 561 of 5.12.1863).

taluka increased from approximately 3,620 acres in 1876–77 to 8,880 acres in 1886–87; while the area in Borsad increased from approximately 4,260 acres in 1876–77 to 7,400 in 1886–87. In the *nurwa* villages in the north of Matar taluka, too, tobacco cultivation increased from 600 acres in 1876–77 to 1,160 in 1892. In March 1868 the Revenue Commissioner, A. Rogers, was optimistic enough to comment that the price of tobacco ‘will henceforward always rule proportionately higher than formerly in consequence of its being now permanently connected by rail with the great market of Bombay’, and production concentrated on this crop, it being more valuable than cotton and particularly suited to the rich Charotar soil. By 1895 tobacco covered  $6\frac{1}{2}$  per cent of the cultivated acreage of Nadiad taluka and by 1892 tobacco accounted for a  $7\frac{1}{2}$  per cent of the cultivated acreage of Borsad taluka. In some villages in the west of the taluka nearly a third of the cultivable acreage was under tobacco.<sup>94</sup> The amount of well irrigation, too, ‘due no doubt to the extension of tobacco cultivation’, nearly doubled between 1867 and 1895 on top of previous extensive growth. Prices remained fairly high till 1874<sup>95</sup> and 1869 was an especially good year with remissions on land revenue amounting only to Rs 840.<sup>96</sup> Tobacco was very expensive to produce, so naturally the wealthiest Patidar peasants were initially among the first to take advantage of the increased demand for its production. The *goradu* soil needed ploughing twelve to fourteen times before planting and each acre required between thirty-four and fifty-two loads of the highest quality manure. Captain Prescott commented: ‘Although the cost of producing tobacco is very great and can only be undertaken by substantial cultivators with capital, yet the profit is very large<sup>97</sup>—amounting to Rs 300 in clear profits per acre or twenty to thirty times the revenue assessment. The high quality *kalia* tobacco was sent by rail to the markets of Ahmedabad, Borsad, Broach, Surat, Bulsar and Bombay, and the lower quality *jurdo* was collected by dealers for

<sup>94</sup> Fernandez (Deputy Super. Rev. Survey, Gujarat): ‘There is no doubt . . . that the western part of Borsad is the heart of the tobacco country’. *Papers Relating to the Revision Survey Settlement* (hereafter *R.S.S.*) *of the Borsad Taluka of the Kaira Collectorate* (Bombay, 1895), p. 4.

<sup>95</sup> Choksey, *Economic Life in the Bombay Gujarat*, p. 149.

<sup>96</sup> All these statistics are from the *R.S.S. Reports of Borsad and Nadiad Talukas* (1895), the *Bombay Presidency Annual Jamabandi Reports, 1881/2 to 1900/01*, the *Annual Season & Crop Reports, 1884/5 to 1919/20*, and *Correspondence*, p. 264 (no. 500A of 13.10.1867).

<sup>97</sup> Capt. Prescott’s Report on Nadiad taluka, *Correspondence*, pp. 145–6 (no. 418 of 25.11.1865), and Cruikshank, *Reports*, pp. 69 and 93. As a comparison the Deccan Riots Commission estimated the total possessions of the average Deccan Kanbi to be worth a mere Rs 200.

transmission to Malwa and Marwar via the town of Kapadvanj. Furthermore, the opening of the branch line to Rutlam meant that large quantities of cheap tobacco began to be consumed by Bhils, Naikas and the other 'scheduled' tribesmen of the Panch Mahals. It was even reported in the Cambay Settlement Report that large quantities of Borsad tobacco were exported from Cambay port to countries as distant as Arabia and Turkey.<sup>98</sup>

The boom was not restricted to the Charotar either. In Mahuda taluka there was an 'immense new area of rice land' being brought into cultivation, and in Kapadvanj the area under rice increased until it covered nearly a twelfth (12,260 acres) of the total cultivated acreage.<sup>99</sup> In Broach the condition of many of the Kanbi cultivators of the district was said to have been 'permanently improved by the high prices that ruled during the American war',<sup>100</sup> in Surat district Bardoli and Olpad became highly cultivated tracts,<sup>101</sup> and, although in Daskroi and Dholka talukas in Ahmedabad development began at a slower pace, this was the very beginning of the transformation which by the 1920s was to cover the largest acreage in all the Gujarati districts but Kheda with cotton.<sup>102</sup>

Accompanying this period of economic growth was an escalation in land prices and in land litigation. In Matar taluka land was selling for approximately 34 times the government assessment in 1895, in Anand at 33 times the assessment, and in Mehmedabad at 28 times the level of assessment in 1893. In Nadiad the price of land reached Rs 200 per acre, and, if irrigated, Rs 400 per acre,<sup>103</sup> whilst in Borsad, with prices reaching Rs 700–800 per acre in 1895, the value of land was said to have reached 'famine pitch' and Maconochie, the Revenue Survey Settlement Officer wrote:

prices bear no sort of proportion to the assessment. The fact is that they are scarcity prices. In the narva [*sic*] villages, the value of land forming part of the

<sup>98</sup> In a fit of enthusiasm it was said of Nadiad in 1865 that 'it would be difficult to find a richer looking, or more fertile district in the world' (*Correspondence*, p. 141, *op. cit.*).

<sup>99</sup> *R.S.S. of the Kapadvanj Taluka* (1895), p. 6.

<sup>100</sup> *Surat & Broach Gazetteer*, p. 373.

<sup>101</sup> *Surat & Broach Gazetteer*, p. 62. Thus the average size of farms here was 5 and 9 acres respectively compared with 16½ acres in a dry-crop taluka such as Chikhli.

<sup>102</sup> Desai, *Rural Economy of Gujarat*, p. 55.

<sup>103</sup> *R.S.S. Reports of the Matar, Anand and Nadiad Talukas* (1895) and of the *Mehmedabad Taluka* (1894), respectively pages 16, 19, 121 and 16. If the assessment was correctly pitched it was thought that the average price per acre ought not be more than 20 times the assessment, see *Papers Relating to the Enquiry into the Current Revision Settlements of the Matar and Mehmedabad Talukas of the Kaira district* (Bombay, 1932), p. 12.

narva is not to be estimated, as the Patidars would part with it under no circumstances except compulsion.<sup>104</sup>

Thus as Robertson (the Kheda assistant settlement officer) pointed out, sale prices came to reflect not the real value of land but simply the demand for it, and contrarily, where in the poorer talukas the money-lender had a firm grip, 'rents' did not represent the true economic rent of the land but merely the inflated rate of interest demanded from its occupant.<sup>105</sup> Also the differentiation between the richer and poorer talukas of Kheda district meant that in Thasra taluka the value of land remained 'considerably below that of other Kaira talukas'.<sup>106</sup>

Despite the scale of these developments, however, they were sufficiently superficial not to overturn the social framework within which they took place. The periods of maximum growth were restricted to the duration of the American Civil War and the famine in Southern India from 1877/78 to 1879/80. 1874-75 was a bad year in Borsad and between 1883 and 1893 prices were reported to be steadily falling until by 1895 prices were lower in Anand than in 1867. Over-cropping may also account for the fact that the production of tobacco had begun to contract by that time such that by the early 'nineties tobacco covered only about 7,900 acres in Nadiad taluka and (a couple of years later) 7,050 acres in Borsad.<sup>107</sup> The social pressures created by these changes were additionally increased by rapid population growth, especially in the Charotar and its major towns such as Anand and in the richer villages such as Virsad.<sup>108</sup> In Thasra there were 277 people per square mile in 1865, but in Nadiad and Borsad there were over 522 per square mile in 1865 and 1867 respectively, and throughout Gujarat the most prosperous districts were always the most densely populated. In Borsad taluka, in the heart of the Charotar, the average population density rose to 669 per square mile in 1872 and to 750 per square mile in 1891, according to the censuses. The resulting burden on the land was further aggravated by the run-down of domestic crafts, particularly weaving, under the impact of British imports, which made the population all the more heavily dependent on agriculture.<sup>109</sup>

<sup>104</sup> *R.S.S. of the Borsad Taluka*, para. 29, p. 7, and para. 38, p. 9.

<sup>105</sup> *2nd R.S.S. of the Matar Taluka*, para. 16, p. 10.

<sup>106</sup> *R.S.S. of the Thasra Taluka*, p. 7 and appendix K.

<sup>107</sup> *R.S.S. of the Kapadvanj Taluka*, p. 10. Steady progress didn't even begin in Kapadvanj till 1877/78. See also other *R.S.S. Reports*, particularly *Borsad*, para. 32, *Nadiad*, p. 24, and *Kheda Gazetteer*, pp. 114-15.

<sup>108</sup> According to the figures given in the settlement reports the population of Borsad taluka was increasing by approximately 1.8% p.a. in the late nineteenth century—a rate many times greater than that to be found in the less prosperous talukas.

<sup>109</sup> *2nd R.S.S. of the Mehmedabad Taluka*, p. 12.



### Exploitation and Differentiation

As this economic growth did not yet evoke a significant qualitative transformation of agrarian society the reaction of different castes still depended heavily on their initial standing, and the increased economic mobility possible was actually employed initially by the superior Patidars to increase differentiation within society, as far as was possible. In the early nineteenth century it was said that 'the sharer's chief source of profit did not lie in rack-renting his tenants but in the better class of tillage made possible by his advances and accommodations',<sup>110</sup> and 'though there were no men of great wealth, there was no class of landless labourers.'<sup>111</sup> But the revenue system imposed in the 1860s helped to encourage a greater diversity of interests and wealth among the Kanbis. Already it was the case that some tenants in *nurwa* villages 'throve better and were further from want than the shareholders',<sup>112</sup> and as the general level of prosperity tended to erode divisions within the caste the superior Patidars further adapted to circumstances in order to preserve their social rank.

Of the biggest landlords remaining from Maratha times, the *desais* and *amins*, some clung on as a purely rentier class. Others found employment in the reformed government of the Gaikwad Sayaji Rao III in Baroda state or were nominated as Presidents over the district boards or as honorary magistrates in British territories. In Ahmedabad several Kanbis rose to 'high positions in government service',<sup>113</sup> and, of the former administrative élite in Kheda, Haridas Desai even obtained a seat on the Bombay Legislative Council in 1888.<sup>114</sup> With a vested interest in the government they could prove loyal allies; for instance, Viharidas Desai refused help to the rebel leader Tantia Tope when he fled to Nadiad in 1858.<sup>115</sup> Kheda patidars did not have quite the same educational or job opportunities as those of Baroda however, and many other of the large landowners, who had been deprived of their administrative functions but not their lands, joined the larger body of superior

<sup>110</sup> *Ahmedabad Gazetteer*, p. 156.

<sup>111</sup> *Kheda Gazetteer*, p. 97.

<sup>112</sup> *Kheda Gazetteer*, p. 106.

<sup>113</sup> *Ahmedabad Gazetteer*, p. 36.

<sup>114</sup> Hardiman, 'Peasant Agitations', pp. 46-7 and 51. As in Ahmedabad, as N. R. F. Charlesworth observed (see 'Agrarian Society & British Administration in Western India, 1847-1920', Cambridge D.Phil. 1974, p. 117), 'The "talukdar" was a broken reed who could safely be patronised.'

<sup>115</sup> Hardiman, 'Peasant Agitations', pp. 45-6, though R. K. Dharaiya, *Gujarat in 1857* (Ahmedabad, 1970), p. 104, gives a rather different impression.

Patidars who had lost their unbridled administrative powers and, like the Anavil Brahmin *desais* of Haria in Surat district, were now turning to agriculture and using the position given them as the principal shareholders in the village coparcenaries to extend their control over the village economy. Central to their relationship with the cultivators and village artisans was moneylending and their command over the labour market, both of which the superior Patidars employed to their advantage.

We have already observed that 'many of the sharers did not work with their own hands', whilst others 'let out part of their share, tilling the richest fields by the help of relations and servants'.<sup>116</sup> The necessary labour force could be hired in a variety of ways: *bhagdari* was where 50 per cent, say, of a crop would go to a labourer in return for his service (this can be hereditary and even mistaken for a form of sub-tenancy), and *chakar* or *nokari* was (and still is) wage labour paid monthly or seasonally, included in which was a set of clothes each year and food in the fields. Finally there was a *bhagia*, which was simply payment in kind for labour service which became more common in the first decades of the twentieth century (noticeably in Matar taluka in the 1930s)<sup>117</sup> as it suited some of the small, largely self-cultivating landowners, who could not afford to hire labour all the year round, and who by then were coming to dominate the economy.<sup>118</sup> In Ahmedabad and Kheda there was, none the less, always some element of bonded labour, as a comment in the Ahmedabad Gazetteer reveals: 'In each share the cultivators and even the village artisans were the sharer's men, *asamis*',<sup>119</sup> and in 1819 Mr Dunlop wrote in the Jamabandi report: 'the Kolis of Bayad in Parantij are all slaves to the Patels, their ancestors having sold themselves during a famine';<sup>120</sup> it was not, however, as institutionalized as in the Surat District. Here the number of landless labourers amounted to 17–25 per cent of the population among whom were a group of bondsmen (known as *halis*) trapped in hereditary servitude. Essentially an exploitative relationship hinging on debt it was mitigated by a degree of patronage which, however, gradually disappeared as the economy was monetized and developed, throwing the powerlessness and subjection of

<sup>116</sup> *Kheda Gazetteer*, pp. 105–6.

<sup>117</sup> Desai, *Rural Economy of Gujarat*, p. 156.

<sup>118</sup> The names for the various forms of labour service are taken from D. Pocock's contemporary account (see *Kanbi and Patidar*, p. 22) but there are nineteenth-century documentary references e.g. *Correspondence*, p. 7.

<sup>119</sup> *Ahmedabad Gazetteer*, p. 156, also *Kheda Gazetteer*, p. 88.

<sup>120</sup> *Ahmedabad Gazetteer*, p. 80.

the lower castes into sharper relief.<sup>121</sup> In the Southern plain of the Surat district the Anavil Brahmans were the chief landowners and local power élite and their 'hereditary serfs' were of the Dubla tribal caste who totalled 10 per cent of the population and were almost exclusively landless labourers.<sup>122</sup> Just as the élite of the Lewa Kanbis in Kheda distinguished themselves by the title of 'Patidar', so in Surat Jan Breman<sup>123</sup> believes the élite may have become Brahmans in order to legitimize their secular authority; and just as the Charotar Patidars had gained the most responsible positions in the Maratha administration, so in the south of the Surat district the *desais* had been drawn from among the caste of Anavil Brahmans. Likewise in both districts the abolition of revenue farming caused the decline of the *desais* and their amalgamation into the leisured, landowning, moneylending peasant élite—respectively the superior Patidars and the Bhattelas,<sup>124</sup> though in both cases the Lewa Kanbis and the Anavil Brahmans as a whole remained the leading castes. The status of both groups was threatened by hypergamy and the resultant economic and social mobility, and each in turn reacted in some degree by cultivating high profit cash-crops and using the earnings to enlarge their property holdings or to build large and expensive ancestral homes, thus aspiring to the values of traditional élites: both 'merely wished to be the equal of the Desais for whom land was a prestige good rather than a capital good'.

The difference between the two emerges in the fact that while the Bhattelas imitated Brahmanic 'purity' in order to raise their status, the Patidar tended to emulate the Vania, and the lesser emphasis he gave to ritual purity (reflecting the influence of the *bhakti* sects)<sup>125</sup> meant that greater encouragement was given to hypergamy and the competitive social ethic, the desire for *sudharavun*, self-improvement, and superiority over others. J. B. Shukla described the *hali* system in the Olpad taluka of

<sup>121</sup> For example an Anavil who engaged a Hali who had left another master without his permission was fined and the Dubla was punished by caning.

<sup>122</sup> Choksey, *Economic Life in the Bombay Gujarat*, pp. 55–6: 'Almost all families of the Dublas had been slaves for many generations . . . The Desais had the privilege of paying the lower rates of assessment allowed to Kaliparaj . . . and treating them with a rude sort of kindness got hold of in their names the richest lands. These lands were cultivated by the Kaliparaj as *halis* while the Desais lived like lords'.

<sup>123</sup> Jan Breman, *Patronage and Exploitation, Changing Agrarian Relations in South Gujarat, India* (California, 1974).

<sup>124</sup> See *ibid.*, p. 47.

<sup>125</sup> Pocock, *Kanbi and Patidar*, p. 32: 'the Patidars, having come up, for the greater part, in the British period . . . were less concerned with the traditional symbols of status (e.g. the sacred thread).' The popularity of the puritanical *swaminarayan* sect, particularly, accounts for the comparatively low status of Brahmans in Gujarat.

Surat as 'the backbone of the taluka and of the Surat district in general',<sup>126</sup> but in Kheda it was the railway which formed the backbone of the economy and to a greater extent the sactions that preserved the status of the superior Patidar were those associated with a surplus-oriented market economy. The *hali* system did not begin to break down until the 1930s when the railway network was extended and the labour intensive cultivation of sugarcane gave way to the cultivation of alphonso mangoes (*afus*) which required a smaller and only seasonal labour force. In Kheda, however, the superior Patidars had never been inhibited by the responsibilities of patronage to the same extent and evolved a subtly exploitative relationship with the *kaliparaj*, or lower castes, at an earlier date. An important feature of this was the exploitation of debt, and in the field of moneylending generally the superior Patidars came to the fore, both as borrowers and usurers, as the century advanced.

Whereas the investment during the American Civil War was highly speculative, many cultivators wasting the profits,<sup>127</sup> the investment thereafter in the steady improvement in agriculture was channelled through the hands of the wealthiest Patidars, particularly in the Charotar and neighbouring talukas. As early as 1877 it was said 'the Surat rural money lender, the Marwari shop-keeper, would seem to hold a stronger position than the Kaira Shravak . . . [as] he has less to fear from the efforts of rival capitalists'.<sup>128</sup> In 1893 in villages such as Shikoldi in Matar taluka 'practically all the land' was in the possession of rack-renting 'Baroda rayats',<sup>129</sup> probably Patidars from the Petlad taluka; and exactly the same process was underway in Ahmedabad: 'In the Cotton villages the thrifty Kanbis saved money during the high prices at the time of the American war, some of which they still retain, but not so the other classes of cultivators'. Consequently, as the area under cultivation increased there arose 'a demand on the part of the Kanbi for more hired labour to enable him to work his larger holding'. In Baroda 'the Koli has neither seed nor cattle, nor plough, and for the use of each of these requisites he is generally indebted to the village Vania or Kanbi, to whom he makes some return . . . with the Kanbi by assisting him in his

<sup>126</sup> Shukla, *Life and Labour in a Gujarat Taluka*, p. 115. According to the census three-quarters of the agricultural labourers in Surat were still *halis*.

<sup>127</sup> *Ibid.*, ch. IX, pp. 232ff. Thus in the similarly advanced taluka of Olpad nearly two-thirds of money borrowed was spent on non agricultural items, and 'ancestral debt', which with marriage accounted for the largest proportion of total debt, was 'largely a legacy' from the cotton boom of the 'sixties.

<sup>128</sup> *Surat and Broach Gazetteer*, p. 202.

<sup>129</sup> *R.S.S. of the Matar Taluka*, (1895), p. 80.

work'.<sup>130</sup> Generally where superior capitalist classes had been mostly Shravak Vantias they now tended to be *vaishnavs* by religion, i.e. Meshri Vantias and Kanbis, and bonded labour continued to give way to hired labour.<sup>131</sup> In the Petlad subdivision the wealthy Patidar carried his emulation of the Vantias even further and began 'to take a lead in petty trades' which he funded by sub-letting his lands<sup>132</sup> and, inevitably, as the condition of the Patidars as a whole improved the lower castes lost out: 'there can be no doubt that slowly but surely the inferior class of cultivator is being divorced from the land. Banyas are not the only money-lenders, for a considerable business is carried on by well-to-do Patidars. The tendency must be for the Kanbi to oust the Koli . . .'.<sup>133</sup>

Besides the all too apparant inequality in the distribution of proprietary holdings (see appendix I) the statistics available tell us nothing about the size of cultivating units; nor are changes in the distribution of proprietary holdings readily apparent. Small sub-sharers and tenants in *nurwa* villages were usually not registered and elsewhere there was extensive sub-leasing and sub-letting of which the government had no records. Money-lenders would also frequently leave debtors to cultivate their own fields, but would take half of the crop and pay the revenue demand, though officially the land still remained in the name of the debtor.<sup>134</sup> In Surat even *halis* generally cultivated 'a small plot of land of their own',<sup>135</sup> and in Broach too, the picture was confused as 'in many instances' cultivators of one village were found to be engaged in tilling the land of another village.<sup>136</sup> Nevertheless, the Patidars in the Charotar village of the highest standing included a large number reputedly living exclusively on their rents who could dictate to their debtors what crops ought to be grown and control the distribution and marketing, and in Nadiad, Vaso and Sojitra it was said that none actually cultivated and that all the Patidars lived exclusively on either rents, trade or the professions. E. Maconochie wrote of Thasra taluka: 'the amounts of land, the proprietary rights in which have passed out of the hands of the cultivators into those of the money-lenders is much greater than appears from village books. It is no exaggeration to say that very little superior

<sup>130</sup> *Gazetteer of the Bombay Presidency, vol. VII, Baroda*, (1883), (hereafter *Baroda Gazetteer*), p. 67.

<sup>131</sup> *Ahmedabad Gazetteer*, pp. 67, 80 and 64.

<sup>132</sup> *Baroda Gazetteer*, p. 126.

<sup>133</sup> E. Maconochie, January 1895, *R.S.S. of the Borsad Taluka*, p. 6.

<sup>134</sup> Maconochie described this as 'a very common practice', *R.S.S. of the Thasra Taluka*, p. 7.

<sup>135</sup> *Surat & Broach Gazetteer*, p. 67.

<sup>136</sup> *Surat & Broach Gazetteer*, p. 387.

land near Thasra belongs to the people [Kolīs] who till it'.<sup>137</sup> But in Borsad he found 'everywhere well off' . . . In villages such as Virsad, Sajipur and those near Petlad there are men of substance, who, besides cultivating, carry on a thriving business as money-lenders', and as a consequence the Kolīs were heavily in debt: 'They have the vaguest notion as to what they pay to government, and so long as the Banya pays their assessment, and allows them and their families sufficient for their modest wants, they are content . . . In one case enquired into by the Mamlatdar, a debt of Rs. 25 mounted up in 18 years to Rs. 500 through the renewal of bonds, and such cases will be found in every village.'<sup>138</sup>

Ambitious Patidars sought opportunities even further outside the Charotar: thus Ghanshyam Shah came across a folk-tale describing how Patidars from Kheda purchased forest land in North Gujarat at cheap rates from some Rajput landowners, and how by clearing and cultivating the land they impoverished the Kolīs, who depended on the forest and waste ground, and aroused the jealousy of the Rajputs.<sup>139</sup> Dharalas, Rajputs and Mussalmans throughout Kheda were 'over head and ears in debt', and the butt of the large number of notices of arrears issued in poorer talukas (Matar: 2,075 between 1890 and 1893), and in Matar at least it was said that 'the mass . . . are, as a matter of fact, cultivating the land not . . . on their own behalf, but on behalf of the Saukars [moneylenders] into whose hands they have fallen . . .'.<sup>140</sup> These same *saukars* were 'the principal purchasers of surplus produce' and 'having to a very great extent the ryats in their power' they were able still 'to fix "fancy" prices'.<sup>141</sup>

The revisions of the government's revenue demands in the 1890s did nothing to improve the situation. For example, the system of subsoil water assessment introduced served merely to unload on to poorer peasants and farmers some of the burden of the *bagayut kussur* tax on the irrigated fields of wealthier Patidars, and the wealthiest villages in Borsad taluka only suffered an 8 per cent increase in assessment compared with the 18–25 per cent increase imposed on all the other talukas. Maconochie concluded that 'the settlement is all in the Patidar's favour'.<sup>142</sup> Thus, hardly surprisingly, murders of usurers were frequent

<sup>137</sup> *R.S.S. of the Thasra Taluka*, para. 16, p. 6.

<sup>138</sup> *R.S.S. of the Borsad Taluka*, p. 10.

<sup>139</sup> Ghanshyam Shah, *Caste Association and Political Process in Gujarat, A Study of Gujarat Kshatriya* (Bombay, 1975), pp. 24–5.

<sup>140</sup> H. R. Cooke (Collector), *R.S.S. of the Matar Taluka*, p. 74, para. 7.

<sup>141</sup> Bulkley's report on Kapadvanj, *Correspondence*, p. 719.

<sup>142</sup> *R.S.S. of the Borsad Taluka*, p. 9.

after 1870,<sup>143</sup> and disturbances such as that among the Bhils of Jalod in the Panch Mahals in 1899 became more common as a result of the pressure of debt.<sup>144</sup>

Commensurate with the rationalization of relations between the castes was the development of a centre-periphery relationship between the Charotar and the poorer talukas of Kheda. Thasra and Matar talukas particularly were dominated by a small number of wealthy landowners from the Charotar—for instance in Samalpura and Golaj in Thasra there was ‘hardly any grazing for the villagers unless they buy the rights from capitalists to whom the grass lands have been rented on very favourable terms’. The ‘Desai of Nadiad’ who invested in *mal* (under-fertile) lands in Ajpura and adjoining villages and Garbaddas Haribhai, were just two such ‘capitalist landlords’.<sup>145</sup> By far the most important crop in the taluka was rice cultivated for sale, together with *bajri*, for as a consequence of the tobacco boom in the Charotar there was ‘a very large demand for rice from the neighbouring talukas of Anand, Nadiad and Borsad . . .’. This intensive cultivation of a bulk crop for export put a heavy demand on the labour force, and even with landless agricultural labourers accounting for 10 per cent of the working population the supply was still ‘by no means equal to the demand’.<sup>146</sup> Matar taluka produced even more rice (sold at the door to merchants or their agents for export to the Charotar) amounting to 22 per cent of the cultivated area in 1893. In the extreme north-east Lewa Kanbis on the borders of the Charotar dominated the talukas, but elsewhere the *kaliparaj* were ‘wretchedly poor’ and consequently addicted to opium-eating and drink.<sup>147</sup> One group of villagers were even desperate enough to sell their manure to Charotar Patidars, while in another village (Maliataj) debt was estimated at Rs 70,000 or 100 times the proposed rental on government land—the crucial comparison. Amongst the *inam* villages debt was worse still and almost all the land was thought to be mortgaged to wealthy Patidars from the Matar villages of Undhela, Alindra, Laval and Kandhli where it has been noted that ‘many of the ryats are . . . lenders of money on lands in other villages’.<sup>148</sup>

All the same, the re-definition of the rural hierarchy in the late

<sup>143</sup> *Kheda Gazetteer*, p. 121.

<sup>144</sup> Choksey, *Economic Life in the Bombay Gujarat*, p. 59.

<sup>145</sup> *R.S.S. of the Thasra Taluka*, para. 45, p. 11, and p. 108.

<sup>146</sup> *R.S.S. of the Thasra Taluka*, para. 13, p. 4, para. 29, p. 7.

<sup>147</sup> For example, in Mandvi taluka in Surat district the Chodras, among the poorest in Gujarat, who accounted for 43% of the population, consumed 72% of the spirits produced in the taluka. See Choksey, *Economic Life in the Bombay Gujarat*, p. 57.

<sup>148</sup> *R.S.S. of the Matar Taluka*, p. 81.

nineteenth century did not exclusively benefit the Patidars. The pattern was one of change at all levels of society, though the most important élites still remained those who were pre-eminent at the time of the revenue survey. This meant that while the superior Patidars struggled to maintain their position by financing the cultivation of tobacco, *tur*, *mhowra* berries and other cash-crops, by entering new fields such as money-lending and marketing, or in some cases by withdrawing totally from cultivation and concentrating on rentier activities, their ranks were gradually being infiltrated from below by Kanbis and lesser Patidars. Similarly others among the well-to-do *ujiliparaj* castes were advancing themselves. For example, the Borahs, the most successful Muslim cultivators, dominated parts of Kapadvanj such as the area around the village of Alina, though they were politically weak like the Brahmins. The only group that really lost out was that of the *kaliparaj*—the tribesmen and lower castes, such as the Chuwalia Kolis, who fell prey to the capitalists and moneylenders and whose whole lifestyle had been undermined by the new Survey System: ‘. . . it deprives them of the means of defrauding the revenue . . . and they are averse, too, to being tied down to the cultivation of particular fields of fixed size and assessment and prefer taking up bits of waste when it suits their convenience . . .’<sup>149</sup> A complete contrast to their experience was that of the ‘Tulubda’ Kolis of Nadiad taluka who were ‘gradually getting the status of Koombies’<sup>150</sup> following a great ‘reform in their habits,’<sup>151</sup> and even in backward and disease-infested Matar taluka some possessed ‘good houses and a great deal of agricultural stock . . .’<sup>152</sup>

Throughout the second half of the nineteenth century the better class of Kolis, the Tulubdas, had been trying to raise their status above that of the other three major groups—the Khants, Patanvadias and Chuwalias. In the early nineteenth century some had become Patidars but as this avenue was restricted claims were gradually voiced to Kshatriya status, it being argued that Kolis originated out of a mixture of the blood of Rajputs and aboriginal Bhils. Thus ‘Koli’ rather like ‘Kanbi’ became a derogatory term in the twentieth century and Kolis called themselves Rajputs or Kshatriyas or just used their surnames. This was just like the Lewa Kanbis, ‘only a few of whom deserve the exalted title of Patidar though they like and use it just as many plain misters like to be called *esquires*’.<sup>153</sup> In Kheda all the Kolis, Tulabdas included, called themselves

<sup>149</sup> *Correspondence*, p. 602 (no. 561 of 5.12.1863).

<sup>150</sup> *Correspondence*, p. 148 (no. 418 of 25.11.1865).

<sup>151</sup> *Correspondence*, para. 18, p. 441 (no. 77 of 23.1.1863).

<sup>152</sup> *Correspondence*, para. 15, p. 418 (no. 542 of 31.12.1862).

<sup>153</sup> *R.S.S. of the Anand Taluka* (1895), p. 33.



'Dharalas' or Swordsmen, as if to affirm their claim to Rajput descent, except the lowly Patanvadias who were called simply 'Kolis'. Some sought education and secured appointments as government talatis,<sup>154</sup> and hypergamy developed too, partly in imitation of the Rajputs to whom they aspired to marry their daughters, but also stimulated by the more recent example set by the Patidars. By the 1920s Koli efforts at sanskritization led them to spend large amounts on dowries, to prohibit re-marriage, to observe Rajput religious festivals and to attempt to cut themselves off from their poorer caste mates.<sup>155</sup> Both Kolis and Kanbis sought to imitate higher castes by turning 'their women more and more into parasites',<sup>156</sup> and the Tulabdas sought separate status in the 1931 census at the same time as the Kanbis of Kheda district laid claim to the common title of 'Patidar'.

Thus the same social turmoil that beset the Patidars was present among other castes. The competition between different sub-castes, exacerbated by British patronage and by development of the rural economy, was in large measure a pan-Gujarati phenomenon, but it was in Kheda that these forces were first to find a focus in political agitation.

### Agricultural Depression and a Closing of the Ranks

During the Great Famine of 1899-1900 and the years of plague and drought which immediately followed, the population of Gujarat endured its greatest test since the advent of British rule. In the eighteenth century there had been a severe famine roughly every seventeen years on average, and that extending over 1812 and 1813 was severe enough to have lingered in folk memory as 'Ignothare' (i.e. *Samvat* 1869 or A.D. 1813), but after 1836 there had hardly been a single year of scarcity until the 'Chappan' (*Samvat* '56 or A.D. 1899) famine sixty years later and this perhaps accounts for the scale of its impact.<sup>157</sup>

In Kheda district the Malthusian trap had been closing imperturbably for nearly half a century and already by the 1890s a decline in tobacco production and a general fall in prices had served to warn landholders in the Charotar of their vulnerability. But in the event between 1899 and December 1900 1,300,000 people died in British

<sup>154</sup> *Land Revenue Proceedings*, 1900, p. 810.

<sup>155</sup> See the *Gazetteer of the Bombay Presidency*, vol. IX, pt I, pp. 237-44, and Shah, *Caste Association and Political Process in Gujarat*, p. 14.

<sup>156</sup> Shukla, *Life and Labour in a Gujarat Taluka*, p. 67.

<sup>157</sup> Col. A. T. Etheridge, *Report on Past Famines in the Bombay Presidency* (1868), p. 50.

Gujarat, mostly from disease, as the price of *kadbi* (a principal food grain) rose from Rs 13 to Rs 36 per 1,000 lbs. The impoverished poured into Ahmedabad. In Borsad taluka alone 55,000 were employed on relief works by July 1900<sup>158</sup> (though many were migrants) and the total cost of relief operations amounted to 113 lakhs of rupees. The Kheda district was initially among the hardest hit: the population, which had climbed from 8 lakhs in 1881 to  $8\frac{3}{4}$  lakhs in 1891, and possibly to nearly 10 lakhs by 1899, declined to a mere 7 lakhs by 1901.<sup>159</sup> The non-cultivating proprietors and money-lenders, or in other words many of the superior Patidars of Kheda, suffered most of all financially as their tenants deserted the fields and their cattle (numbering 254,000—estimated to be worth 120 lakhs of rupees) perished. Having exhausted their resources attempting to procure fodder supplies it is likely to have been the weaker members of this group who had to resort to melting down and selling their copper and brass valuables, creating in the process an export trade from Gujarat amounting to 36,000 *maunds* of brass and 38,000 *maunds* of copper where none had previously existed.<sup>160</sup> The non-proprietary tenant cultivators and the landless labourers were equally severely hit, the mortality among this class, especially in the poorer talukas, being by far the highest. For example the population of Dheds fell by 55 per cent between 1891 and 1901.<sup>161</sup> By contrast, the largely self-cultivating lesser Patidars, and to a greater extent now the ordinary Kanbis—the group which Hardiman characterizes as the ‘middle peasantry’—endured these years with a remarkable resilience. Their wealth still lay mostly in the skill of their hands and the land, and they depended on no one else for employment—thus B. E. Modi (the Kheda deputy collector) claimed in evidence to the famine commission that ‘they were not at all affected’ apart from two or three per cent at the end of 1900.<sup>162</sup> During the famine it was thought that Borsad taluka, where the lesser Patidars were most concentrated, was ‘better off . . . than any other part of the district’,<sup>163</sup> and the collector C. W. Hudson went as far as to declare: ‘I

<sup>158</sup> *Report on the Famine in the Bombay Presidency, 1899–1902* (Bombay 1903), vol. 1, p. 9, para. 22.

<sup>159</sup> Percentage decrease of population, 1899–1900:

Kheda	17.8	Ahmedabad	13.6
Panch Mahals	16.7	Surat	2.0
Broach	14.4		

See *Census of India, 1901*, vol. IX, pt I, p. 26.

<sup>160</sup> *Report on the Famine in the Bombay Presidency, 1899–1902*, vol. I, p. 90, para. 172.

<sup>161</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 89 and 115.

<sup>162</sup> *Indian Famine Commission, 1901*, appendix, vol. I [Evidence/Bombay], pp. 561, 564 and 565.

<sup>163</sup> *Famine Department Proceedings*, November and December 1901, p. 5141.

do not consider that any relief is required in this taluka. It has probably been the least affected of any in the district during the last three years of famine.'<sup>164</sup>

There is, moreover, much to suggest that recovery was swifter than David Hardiman has argued, and that the group of lesser Patidar peasants benefited from a greater independence after the famine. In 1917 Robertson (the assistant settlement officer working in Kheda) commented: 'Having met and talked with many persons who went through the famine of 1900, and having myself seen the scarcity years of 1911-12 and 1915-16, I am greatly impressed with the progressive ability of the people to cope with famine conditions . . . they have made a wonderful recovery'.<sup>165</sup> Also after the famine cultivators began to 'watch the market and obtain the best price for produce without excessive reliance on middlemen',<sup>166</sup> and Robertson observed that by 1916 'a good many Patidars who cultivate land lend money in a small way'.<sup>167</sup> Superior Patidar money-lenders on the other hand would have lost a great deal at this time for they ' . . . like government, had to write off many debts as irrecoverable after the famine . . . [and] are less willing to lend to the poorer class of agriculturist than formerly. The latter had to become more self dependent and the growth of co-operative credit societies shows that there has been some progress in this direction.'<sup>168</sup> The hardships experienced by the *kaliparaj* were directly transformed into material losses for the superior Patidars who as a consequence of the high death rate and levels of default among their clients gained from them only useless tracts of unproductive land in the poorest talukas. By such means 18 per cent of the land in Matar and 20 per cent in Mehmedabad taluka fell into the laps of 'non-agriculturists', but in both talukas rice lands had been rendered totally infertile by the scattered rainfall and fallow and grass lands had come to cover nearly a quarter of all the agricultural land.<sup>169</sup> These lands were then a further drain on their resources as the government failed to grant any reduction in their assessment which became a punitive tax on landlords and money-lenders alike.<sup>170</sup> Urban *saukars* and superior Patidars both had their fingers severely burned as rents plummeted, sometimes until they did

<sup>164</sup> *Land Revenue Proceedings*, 1902, p. 2072.

<sup>165</sup> *2nd R.S.S. of the Matar Taluka*, p. 73.

<sup>166</sup> *Report on the Famine in the Bombay Presidency, 1899-1902*, vol. I, p. 87.

<sup>167</sup> *2nd R.S.S. of the Mehmedabad Taluka* (Bombay, 1921), p. 6, para. 13.

<sup>168</sup> *2nd R.S.S. of the Matar Taluka*, p. 74 and p. 6, para. 12.

<sup>169</sup> Compare *R.S.S. of the Matar Taluka*, para. 18 with *2nd R.S.S.* para. 6, and *R.S.S. of the Mehmedabad Taluka*, para. 14 with *2nd R.S.S.* para. 7.

<sup>170</sup> See the comments on Matar in *Land Revenue Proceedings*, 1904, p. 2531.

not even reach the level of the assessment on the land. This was particularly noticeable in the case of lands held under the *inam* tenure where as late as 1916 tenants were scarce, in spite of larger numbers having been thrown into dependence on agriculture, and landlords were 'unable to get good rents for their lands.'<sup>171</sup>

Just as the Incumbered Estates Act (revived in 1897) and the Deccan Agriculturists Relief Act (1901) pressurized the *zamindars* in Sind, so, too, in Gujarat harsh post-famine measures included stringent crop valuations on the fields of money-lenders and landlords. In 1901 government resolved that only *bona fide* agriculturists ought not to be pressed for payment of land revenue,<sup>172</sup> and in 1908 instructions were issued that all the arrears of Dharalas and lower castes were to be written off and that Patidars were to be dealt with individually, but that money-lenders were to be made to pay up.<sup>173</sup> Generous interest-free *takavi* loans were made to the self-cultivating occupants in the Kheda district<sup>174</sup> under the Agriculturists Loans Act of 1884, and even to those occupants who held slightly more land than they could cultivate themselves in order to assist them in the hiring of the necessary labour, and the introduction of the Joint Bond system undoubtedly encouraged the lesser Patidars to make increasing use of these resources<sup>175</sup> to which the lower caste cultivating tenants and the landlords had only restricted access.<sup>176</sup> Just as in previous times of hardship, only in the Charotar was land able to find a purchaser during the famine, whilst in Broach the *bhagdari* tenures folded in large numbers under the pressure.<sup>177</sup> The degradation of the lower castes in the more backward talukas additionally ensured that the differentiation between these and the Charotar talukas continued, such that in 1903-04 there were 52 square miles of cultivable waste in the Thasra taluka compared to a mere quarter of a square mile of waste in Borsad. Accordingly Robertson wrote in conclusion:

the general impression is that the best class of cultivators are not so well off as before the famine . . . [and] while the Kunbi population has increased slightly since the famine . . . labour has become scarcer and dearer than formerly. This

<sup>171</sup> Robertson, July 1916, *2nd R.S.S. of the Matar Taluka*, p. 11. The situation was the same in Mehmedabad where formerly in the early 1890s the average rent had been three times the government assessment.

<sup>172</sup> Govt. Resolution 5621, August 1901, *Land Revenue Proceedings*, 1901, p. 1887.

<sup>173</sup> *2nd R.S.S. of the Matar Taluka*, p. 76.

<sup>174</sup> What H. O. Quin (collector in 1899) called 'the fairly well-to-do cultivator', *Indian Famine Commission*, 1901, appendix, vol. I, p. 1091.

<sup>175</sup> *Report on the Famine in the Bombay Presidency, 1899-1902*, vol. I, pp. 67 and 70, and vol. II, pp. 136-7.

<sup>176</sup> *Famine Department Proceedings*, September-December 1902, p. 3161.

<sup>177</sup> Choksey, *Economic Life in the Bombay Gujarat*, p. 77.

does not however affect the small cultivator who cultivates the bulk of this land by himself and his family.<sup>178</sup>

The relative buoyancy of the lesser Patidar peasantry, and of the ordinary Kanbis who were coming to share in their affluence, is further illustrated by their reaction to the price rise in tobacco and cotton (see appendix II). During the decade 1909–19 the price of tobacco in Anand rose to double the level in 1895 and by the decade ending 1929 it had risen half as much again.<sup>179</sup> Cotton rose in price by 43 per cent between 1901 and 1910 and by 1918 had risen to nearly three times its former level—a position which it subsequently maintained. As a result the area under non-food crops in the Kheda district increased from 8 per cent (1895/6) to 32 per cent (1926/7),<sup>180</sup> the largest increase in any Gujarati district, and according to one official this war-time boom ‘enriched the agriculturist to an unprecedented extent’<sup>181</sup>—a trend which was to continue for at least the next five or six years.<sup>182</sup> The tobacco boom saw an expansion in the area under this crop in Gujarat, from 31,000 acres on average between 1910/11 and 1914/15, to 45,000 acres between 1920/1 and 1924/5. This ‘phenomenal expansion’ was ‘mainly confined to Kaira district’, and the accompanying cotton boom developed so rapidly as to place an all-time high of 24 per cent of the gross cropped area of Gujarat under the crop in the quinquennial ending 1914–15. Once achieved, these areas under non-food crops remained fairly constant, though there was a subsequent shift from the cultivation of food to fodder crops.<sup>183</sup>

The collector of Surat observed that despite the calamity at the turn of the century, ‘cultivators no higher than the middle class now enjoy little luxuries, such as tea which were formerly unknown to them.’<sup>184</sup> Ancestral debts were paid off, marriages were paid for, and land prices rose again. There was another housing boom with a ‘keen demand for building sites’<sup>185</sup> developing in the principal towns of the Charotar, two cotton mills were established in Nadiad, and similarly in Broach district Bohra cultivators in one village spent Rs 17,000 on building a new

<sup>178</sup> 2nd R.S.S. of the Mehmedabad Taluka, pp. 12–13.

<sup>179</sup> 2nd R.S.S. of the Anand Taluka (1942), quoted in Choksey, *Economic Life in the Bombay Gujarat*, p. 89.

<sup>180</sup> Mukhtyar, *Land and Labour in a South Gujarat Village*, pp. 4 and 6.

<sup>181</sup> Press Note (December 1918), *Land Revenue Proceedings*, 1918, p. 1413.

<sup>182</sup> At least this was the case in neighbouring Ahmedabad, see the *Statistical Atlas of the Bombay Presidency* (Bombay, 1925), p. 47.

<sup>183</sup> Desai, *Rural Economy of Gujarat*, pp. 55–6.

<sup>184</sup> *Land Revenue Proceedings*, 1900, p. 806.

<sup>185</sup> *Land Revenue Proceedings*, 1920, pp. 61 and 63.

mosque.<sup>186</sup> Recovering from the years of crisis, farmers in Kheda, Ahmedabad and Broach acquired fresh stocks of high quality Kankrej bullocks from Kathiawar and Sind,<sup>187</sup> and by 1916 there were more plough cattle relative to population in some areas than there were in 1892,<sup>188</sup> recovery being most rapid after 1905. The even more rapid growth in the number of ploughs in the Kheda district suggests that the lesser Patidars were now commonly sharing their cattle during the cultivating seasons (partly a consequence of the continued fragmentation of the larger holdings). There was furthermore a rapid increase in the stock of high milk yield buffaloes as Charotar Patidars took a commanding interest in the dairy industry, until by the 1930s a survey by J. M. Mehta revealed that cultivators in Borsad taluka got more than 70 per cent of their subsidiary income from dairying. This was the famous 'white revolution', doubtless the cause of the increased demand for fodder, which began with the establishment of factories for sterilizing and condensing milk at the turn of the century and was considerably encouraged by the first world war.<sup>189</sup>

'A veritable revolution' in communications improved marketing and by equalizing prices throughout the province also put a greater share of the profits of cultivation into the pockets of the peasants themselves.<sup>190</sup> At the same time the restricted tenures, introduced by the Bombay Land Revenue Code Amendment Act in 1901 in order to restore cultivation, curtailed exploitation by the money-lenders. Ten per cent of the land was secured in the hands of Kheda agriculturists in 1903 by this measure, and similar pressures elsewhere in Gujarat caused a gradual disintegration of the estates of the larger landlords—illustrated by a decline in the proportion of proprietary holdings larger than 15 acres

<sup>186</sup> Choksey, *Economic Life in the Bombay Gujarat*, p. 141.

<sup>187</sup> Desai, *Rural Economy of Gujarat*, pp. 83–4.

<sup>188</sup> 2nd R.S.S. of the Mehmedabad Taluka, p. 12. Agricultural Improvement in the Kheda district:

	Total Cattle	Plough Cattle	Milch Cattle	Young Stock	Ploughs	Carts
1900–01	183,228	80,613	61,602	39,899	45,613	23,204
1909–10	320,599	83,169	113,775	121,853	47,413	21,524
1915–16	419,723	103,544	121,853	162,248	57,697	24,082

—*Gazetteer of the Bombay Presidency*, vol. III-b, *Kaira & Panch Mahals* (Bombay, 1926), p. 8.

<sup>189</sup> *Land Revenue Proceedings*, 1900, pp. 807 and 815, also *Land Revenue Proceedings*, 1918, p. 1036, and P. G. Irwin, 'The Dairying Industry of Kaira', *South Asia*, no. I (August 1971), pp. 123–31.

<sup>190</sup> Mukhtyar, *Life and Labour in a South Gujarat Village*, p. 180, commented that up until 1900 'people knew very little of marketing as now understood . . . The money-lender was all supreme . . . [But] paddy is now sold direct in the . . . market and not, as before, through the money-lenders.'

from 11 per cent in 1916-17 to 9 per cent in 1942-3; by 1936 in Kheda only 302 men held a little over 100 acres each.<sup>191</sup> By the same token leasing became more important in response to the growth in cash-crop cultivation by lesser Patidars and Lewa Kanbis who alone could now make these lands pay.<sup>192</sup> J. C. Kumarappa has pinpointed a principal cause of the decline of money-lending and the non-cultivating proprietary class of Patidar:

Prior to the famine of 1900, the money-lender seems to have had a monopoly of financing the farmers of Matar taluka . . . [But] with the advent of government and co-operative societies lending on definite securities [and with legal powers to enforce repayment] the money-lender's risk was enhanced and thus the interest rates were also increased. The government got the first charge, the co-operative society the second charge and the money-lender was left in the lurch. The business of money-lending ceased to be attractive and most of the sowcars [money-lenders] of the taluka found investment for their money in cities.<sup>193</sup>

In one village, Vaudi, he observed that a money-lender was willing to pay an *anna* or two more than the market price for his debtors' grain, so anxious was he to recover some of his losses. The demise of the landlords caused a steady decline in the employment of hired labour<sup>194</sup> and many superior Patidars completely forsook the land for a career in trade or the professions: it was at this time that Vithalbhai Patel and then his brother Vallabhbhai left for England to qualify as barristers.<sup>195</sup>

The superior Patidars probably never recovered from this setback, it being reported in 1932 that money-lenders were still reluctant to advance money in the poorer talukas on the security of land alone and that landlords were still unable to recover rents from their tenants.<sup>196</sup> M. B. Desai likewise found that in the Jambusar taluka of Broach district tenants were decimated by the famine and that accordingly landlords came to be impoverished and were happy to take 'whatever rent they could get'.<sup>197</sup> Lesser Patidar farmers by comparison would have been little inhibited by the rise in labourers' wages that followed;<sup>198</sup> hence

<sup>191</sup> Desai, *Rural Economy of Gujarat*, p. 108, also *Land Revenue Proceedings*, 1918, p. 1039.

<sup>192</sup> J. M. Mehta, *A Study of the Rural Economy of Gujarat* (Baroda, 1930), p. 39, showed that in two villages in the cotton-jowar tract in Surat 12.5% of the total cultivated area was let on lease while in two villages in Kheda the figure was 42%.

<sup>193</sup> J. C. Kumarappa, *Survey of Matar Taluka* (Gujarat Vidyapith, 1931), pp. 102-3.

<sup>194</sup> Desai, *Rural Economy of Gujarat*, pp. 151-3.

<sup>195</sup> D. V. Tahmankar, *Sardar Patel* (G. Allen & Unwin: London, 1970), pp. 39-40.

<sup>196</sup> *Papers relating to the Enquiry into the Current Revenue Settlements of the Matar and Mehmedabad Talukas of the Kaira District* (Bombay, 1932), pp. 8 and 25.

<sup>197</sup> Desai, *Rural Economy of Gujarat*, p. 104.

<sup>198</sup> Choksey, *Economic Life in the Bombay Gujarat*, pp. 141 and 185.

J. B. Shukla estimated that the profits in the self-working cultivation of cotton in Olpad taluka, Surat, could be as much as six times as great as the profits of capitalistic cultivation,<sup>199</sup> and in Kheda right up until the 1940s the growth in the cultivated acreage continued to keep ahead of the accelerating rate of population increase.

It is arguable, therefore, that we are not dealing with a long-term crisis for the lesser Patidar peasantry, but rather in this period the start of a second revolution in cash-crop production with the expansion of cultivation taking place on a much broader basis and surpassing nineteenth-century development which had been funded to a greater extent by urban *saukars* and superior Patidars. This latter class experienced a further setback when the 1929 depression hit the province, while the lesser Patidar peasantry, after a period of retrenchment, forged ahead until by 1937 in Borsad, the heart of the area in which they were dominant, they were able to command more credit than any other agriculturists in British Gujarat.<sup>200</sup> Land litigation began once more to assume a major importance as it had done in the 1860s, and as Lely (the Gujarat Commissioner) had anticipated in 1896 there was now growing up in the inter-war period 'a more luxurious generation [which] seeks after pan-supari, chiroots, hired servants, sweetmeats and American watches . . .'.<sup>201</sup> A final indication of the importance of the prosperous lesser Patidar 'middle peasantry' to the economy is given by the census reports. In 1921 and 1931 there were more cultivating owners in Kheda than in any other district in British Gujarat, or in other words, at 45 per cent of the total number involved in agriculture (1931), nearly twice the national average. As a corollary the proportion of agricultural labourers to the total agricultural population remained the lowest in Gujarat, barely increasing from 9–13 per cent in the 1890s to 16 per cent in 1921, whilst in the Panch Mahals the comparable figure was 26 per cent, in Broach 34 per cent, in Ahmedabad 31 per cent, and in Surat 44 per cent.<sup>202</sup>

With this perspective on the condition of the Kheda peasantry, we might now end with a tentative re-assessment of the social basis of their militancy in the spring of 1918 when, following the destruction of *khariif* crops by excessive rainfall, Mahatma Gandhi was able to use the

<sup>199</sup> Shukla, *Life and Labour in a Gujarat Taluka*, p. 195.

<sup>200</sup> A. D. Patel, *Indian Agricultural Economics* (Bombay, 1937), pp. 233–5, and Desai, *Rural Economy of Gujarat*, ch. VII, pp. 199–200ff.

<sup>201</sup> H. S. Lawrence's memo, *Land Revenue Proceedings*, 1902, p. 1265.

<sup>202</sup> See R.S.S. reports (1895) and *Census of India*, 1921, vol. VIII, pt II, pp. 224–6. A different classification employed in the 1931 census renders estimates of the number of agricultural labourers no longer comparable with earlier figures.



support of the Patidars and Lewa Kanbis of the district to launch his first peasant *satyagraha* in resistance to the revenue demands of the British Raj.

### Cash Crops and Politics—Some Conclusions

It should be apparent from this study that Hardiman's suggestion that the *satyagraha* was a response to the long-term pressures of 'proletarianisation'<sup>203</sup> cannot realistically be substantiated. The 1918 agitation was primarily a movement of well-to-do proprietary cultivators, much as it was in 1922 in Bardoli—a fact which Vallabhbhai Patel himself acknowledged.<sup>204</sup> As soon the no-rent campaign was called off in June 1918, the Patidars, helped by a successful Rabi crop, had no difficulty at all in paying their dues so that by the end of the year collections amounted to a full 22 lakhs of Rupees with only Rs 25,000 in unauthorized arrears, 'mainly owing to a temporary strike of village accountants.'<sup>205</sup> This would seem strange if the people were indeed suffering from the effects of a 'long-term' economic depression and if the tax demands of the state were really fundamentally insupportable. In fact, the burden of the land revenue demand has been exaggerated: J. M. Mehta estimated that in the Charotar a mere 6 per cent of farmer's debts were incurred in order to pay land revenue demands in the 1920s, and M. B. Desai has pointed out that compared to the total cost of advanced cash-crop production the revenue demand was not all that intimidating.<sup>206</sup> This picture is supported by Robertson's observation that 'it is the inhabitants of non-concession villages who never got any concession [a regular 30 per cent remission introduced during the famine] and yet are to get their rates lowered or who are particularly well off who have raised the greatest outcry.'<sup>207</sup>

Ideological commitment was also weak, as Gandhi was well aware,<sup>208</sup> and the degree of hardship suffered by the peasantry overdrawn, as the Servants of India Society claimed,<sup>209</sup> and as the govern-

<sup>203</sup> Hardiman, 'Politicisation and Agitation among Dominant Peasants' p. 369.

<sup>204</sup> Mahadev Desai, *The Story of Bardoli* (Ahmedabad, 1929), p. 111.

<sup>205</sup> *Land Revenue Proceedings*, 1919, p. 737.

<sup>206</sup> Mehta, *Study of Rural Economy of Gujarat*, pp. 67 and 153-7; Desai, *Rural Economy of Gujarat*, p. 164-206.

<sup>207</sup> 2nd R.S.S. of the Matar Taluka, p. 77.

<sup>208</sup> 'The end was far from making me feel happy . . . the Kheda peasants had not fully understood the inner meaning of *Satyagraha*.' See M. K. Gandhi, *An Autobiography or the Story of my Experiments with Truth* (J. Cape, London, 1972), ch. XXV.

<sup>209</sup> Brown, *Gandhi's Rise to Power*, p. 98.

ment's officers were convinced.<sup>210</sup> Furthermore if 'proletarianisation' alone was a cause of Patidar unrest why did the rising Koli cultivators, who were worse hit by the great famine and the bad seasons which sporadically followed, not also refuse to pay government revenue demands. Why, moreover, did discontent erupt in Kheda in 1917/18, rather than in one of many other possible locations in Western India, or at some other time—1918/19 for example, when conditions were much more severe as a consequence of the influenza epidemic? Clearly short-term political factors were important, as Judith Brown has pointed out.<sup>211</sup> Tilak, the Home Rule League, the spread of education and the increasing number of vernacular newspapers, and of course Gandhi himself, were crucial influences. Yet we still have to determine in what respect Kheda society was unique for, as Hardiman has made clear, one cannot dismiss the Patidar's support for the nationalist movement as merely a conjunctural episode without some underlying force providing a consistent rationale behind events.

At this stage it would be worthwhile to summarize our conclusions. In particular, we have emphasized the conservative elements in the revenue settlements and the cohesion among the Patidars which helped to preserve their sub-caste status right up until the second decade of the twentieth century. We have also drawn attention to the dangers inherent in an over-simplified representation of the divisions within the Lewa Kanbi caste, and have argued that rather than the climactic of social change arising in the late nineteenth century, a further quarter of a century had to elapse before there was any organic re-formation of society. Finally we have described how the turn-of-the-century famine was followed by a resurgence in the cultivation of cash-crops by the large group of independent, small-holding Lewa Kanbi peasants in the district, thus leaving the landlord/money-lending peasant élites in retreat on the eve of the nationalist agitations. These conclusions form an important framework without which a political analysis of events in the inter-war period is impossible, for it is apparent that the embourgeoisement of this growing group of cash-crop cultivators, and the heady atmosphere created by rapid social change, was of greater significance in the development of a militant peasantry than the 'frustrations' created by what was in real terms, a comparatively short-lived, if severe, agricultural crisis. Education—for example the establishment of a Charotar

<sup>210</sup> P. J. Mead, chief secretary, May 1919: 'Five good seasons out of the seven preceding years cannot seriously be described as a period of severe agricultural distress.' *Land Revenue Proceedings*, 1919, p. 737.

<sup>211</sup> Brown, *Gandhi's Rise to Power*, pp. 89–93.

education society—and local government reforms played their part in this development, but they were merely levers enabling more important social forces to come into play as the rise of the lesser Patidar and Kanbi peasantry superseded the complex and highly differentiated structure of society in the later nineteenth century. The Lewa Kanbi peasantry were in this sense becoming more homogeneous and as internal material inequalities were overcome there grew up a common group consciousness, isolating them from their new rivals among the lower castes.

On many of these points, however, David Hardiman puts forward a contrary interpretation to that developed here. This encourages him, in the final analysis, to adopt the anachronistic and artificial gradation of the peasantry into classes of 'rich', 'middle' and 'poor' peasants—along the lines which Eric Wolf, in particular, has recently expounded—in an attempt to explain the agrarian roots of political unrest in the sub-continent during this period.<sup>212</sup> It is, however, not at all clear how such an argument can be sustained once full consideration is given to the evolutions within the status network, or how one group, the lesser Patidars, can be characterized as a 'middle peasantry' at a time when economic changes were provoking such a sweeping transformation of the 'normative' structure of Kheda society. Such a conclusion ought hardly to come as a surprise when one considers that Lenin himself used a far more subtle and flexible theoretical model in his study of the development of capitalism in Russia.<sup>213</sup> The terms used in this investigation are, also, barely sufficient heuristic representations of the economic and social structures which moulded Kheda society, but they reveal them in a more satisfactory manner than a deterministic use of inherited and alien categorizations formulated under very different conditions.

It is not possible here, nor was it our primary intention, to analyse the precise relationship between rural stratification and the development of political protest. However, it is clear that we cannot begin to understand the social basis of peasant movements until we have established an understanding of rural society untrammelled by excessively teleological

<sup>212</sup> Hardiman, 'Politicisation and Agitation among Dominant Peasants' and 'Peasant Agitations', p. 316 to end. E. Wolf, *Peasant Wars of the Twentieth Century* (Faber & Faber, London, 1971), pp. 290–3ff. Also see the comments of E. T. Stokes in *The Peasant and the Raj* (Cambridge, 1978), pp. 282–3.

<sup>213</sup> V. I. Lenin, *The Development of Capitalism in Russia* (Progress Publishers, Moscow, 1977), pp. 179–81 and 183–4. By the second decade of the nineteenth century the bulk of the Kheda Patidars most nearly conform to the class of the 'rural bourgeoisie' described here. The dubious nature of any attempt to reduce politics directly and simply to the interaction of class forces is dealt with, from a Marxist point of view, by Cutler, *et al.*, in *Marx's 'Capital' and Capitalism Today*, vol. I (Routledge & Kegan Paul, London, 1977), pp. 314–15ff.

theories of social structure. Such caution is supported in the Kheda district by the fact that no-rent campaigns had taken place there long before Gandhi had even returned from South Africa. Agricultural depression had then only just hit the district and the politicization of the peasantry had barely begun. The revenue settlements of the mid-1890s were obstructed by the villagers, causing 'excessive' loss of time, and in the year 1899-1900

no rent agitations assumed large proportions in the Surat district and increased the difficulties of the taluka officials in Broach and Kaira also . . . , the less educated classes paid up far more willingly than the well-to-do, some of whom were observed in Kaira to refuse, until threatened with the sale of their property, the money which they had lying by them. In one village [in Kheda] a Patil was actually put out of caste for paying his revenue.

It was this 'combination' which caused an excessive number of notices to be issued (equivalent to 71 per cent of the total number of occupancies),<sup>214</sup> and a similar experience was repeated in the year 1900-01<sup>215</sup> and in 1901-02, when 'a strong combination existed in the Kaira district amongst the educated and well-to-do classes to refuse payment of land revenue in the hope of getting remissions.' 'Contumacy was becoming common' and only when 25,000 acres in Kheda were threatened with forfeiture did the campaign dissolve and the defaulters pay up their arrears.<sup>216</sup> Even before the famine the unruly behaviour of *patels* and *talatis*, and the large number of notices issued, had confirmed the notorious turbulence and litigious character of the Kheda agriculturists,<sup>217</sup> which had long since necessitated the posting of a larger than average number of police within the district.

The cohesiveness and militancy shown by the Patidars at such times suggests that much more lay behind rural protest than could ever be explained by straightforward 'economism'. It is not even sufficient to define 'class interests', when a group's consciousness of those interests is yet poorly defined. Hence, as Hardiman points out, we see the political behaviour of the 'superior Patidars' in the 'seven villages' of which he writes, determined as much by the age of individuals concerned as by their wealth or standing within the community. What is lacking is an appreciation of the social environment within which such individuals sought to express their political ambitions and which moulded their

<sup>214</sup> *Land Revenue Proceedings*, 1901, pp. 1943 and 1957-8.

<sup>215</sup> *Land Revenue Proceedings*, 1902, pp. 1413-17.

<sup>216</sup> *Land Revenue Proceedings*, 1903, pp. 1365-6 and 1269.

<sup>217</sup> One *patel* in every five and one *talati* in every four was being fined each year for unruly conduct, a cause of great concern to the government. See *Land Revenue Proceedings*, 1900, pp. 809 and 1640; and *Land Revenue Proceedings*, 1895, pp. 868 and 970.

response to evolutions within society. The mechanism whereby solidarity was achieved among the Lewa Kanbi peasantry immediately strikes one as an aspect of the problem which has been inadequately explored. Great emphasis has been laid throughout on the importance of the highly competitive nature of Lewa Kanbi society, and it is obvious that such rivalry could only be expressed within a relatively cohesive social structure. The ultimate and limited object of this competition was *abroo* (status), often expressed through marriage customs.<sup>218</sup> We might thus view the development of cash-crop cultivation, usury, landlordism, sanskritization, and support for the nationalist movement all as means of satisfying this pervasive social ethic. This situation could only arise because of the comparatively consistent prosperity of the Kheda Kanbis compared with cultivators elsewhere in India, their spurning of ritual caste divisions, and the opportunity given them, by political decisions, to maintain a privileged position in the Charotar.

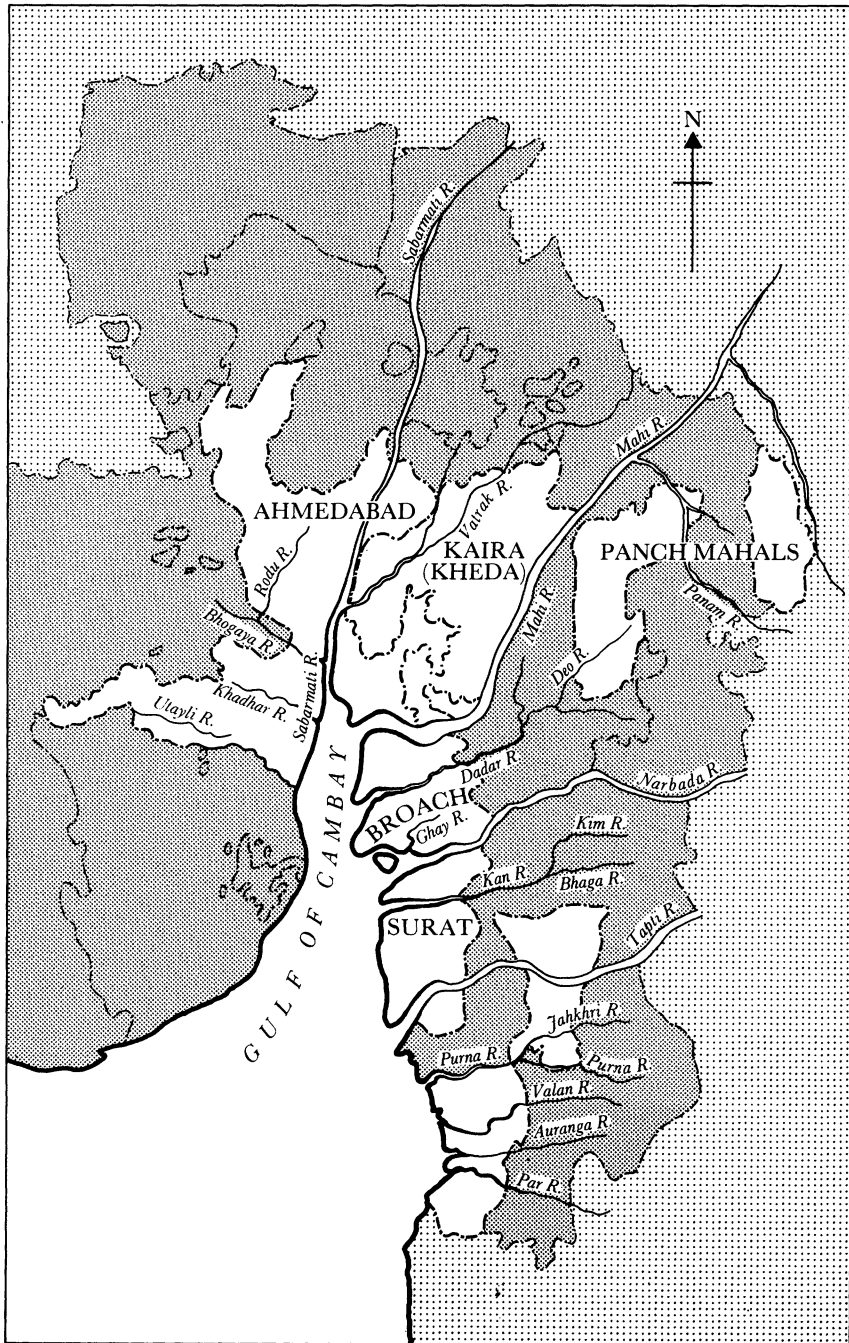
The *ekada* (marriage circles) were an institutionalized reaction to the instability created within the social hierarchy in the late nineteenth century, and as the status of the Patidars continued to be devalued or redefined, and the boom in small-holding cultivation ultimately enabled ordinary Lewa Kanbis to claim lesser Patidari status, the members of the caste looked to provincial politics to provide a larger framework within which they might affirm their corporate identity. As the trend towards the endogamy of the Lewa Kanbis as a whole under the new caste name of 'Patidar' continued, the corporate values of the former Patidar élite were diluted and the potency of this ideal could only be preserved by the evocation of a wider political unity. This is the theme James C. Chadney has chosen in a recent article where he argues that 'processual studies' can best explain the interrelation of caste and class in India:<sup>219</sup> both ritual and economic relations can be used to express corporate ambitions. The infiltration of the ranks of the Patidars from below, the penetration of new ideas and techniques, and the adoption of new political platforms all together reflect a high level of mobility within the caste which made the Lewa Kanbis of Kheda district unique in Western India. This mobility defined as well as thrived on a rigid social ideal (comparable, say, to the 'Protestant ethic'). Hence Ghanshyam Shah commonly heard it said that 'Patidars are very communal, worse

<sup>218</sup> See footnote 13 on p. 109 in A. H. Somjee's article 'Social Mobility Among the Patidars of Kaira', in *Contributions to Asian Studies*, vol. 12 (E. J. Brill: Leiden, Netherlands, 1978), pp. 105-13. This article explores interesting developments subsequent to those discussed here. For instance in the 1960s many Patidars began to oppose Congress for its espousal of 'welfarism'.

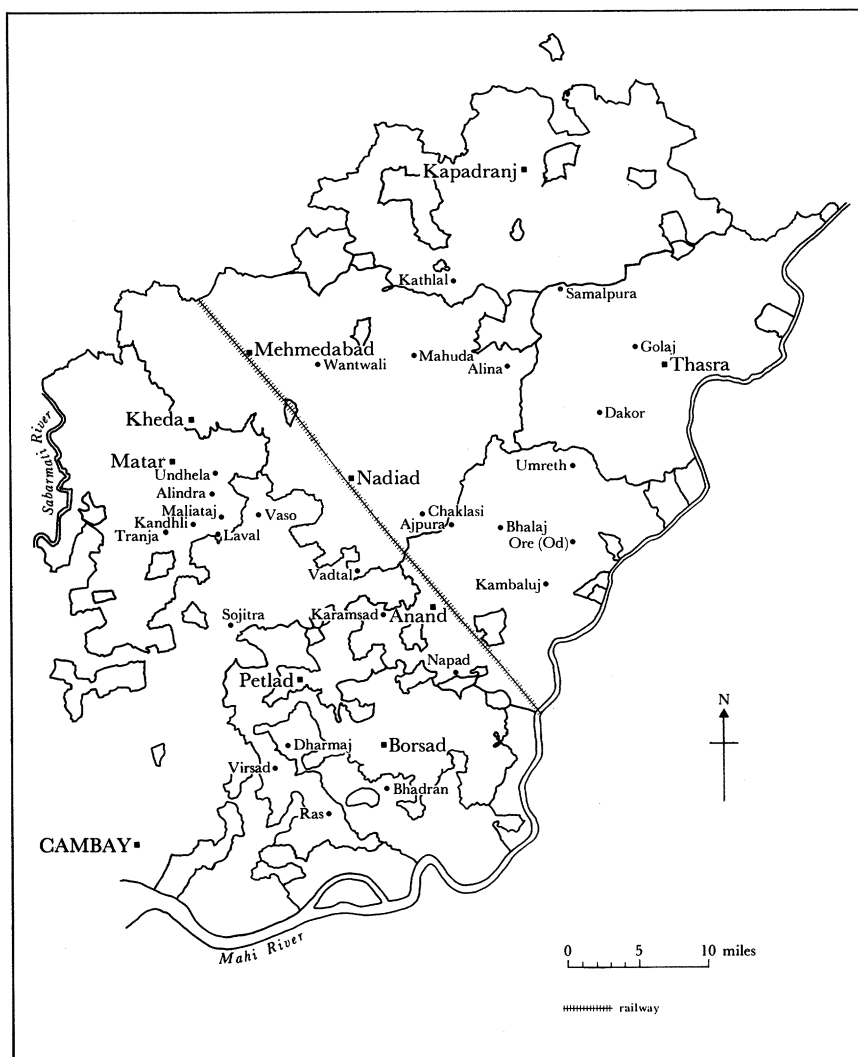
<sup>219</sup> J. G. Chadney, 'Caste and Class in India', *Man in India*, vol. 58, no. 2 (June 1978).

than Muslims.' The 'Patidar ideal', to which all the Lewa Kanbis aspired, lay at the root of the enmity between the Patidars and other castes, and thus it is hardly surprising that, as in their social and economic relations with those of inferior standing within the district, the Patidars rapidly crystallized in support of the Congress, virtually excluding others from participation.<sup>220</sup> This utterly negative conformity was a natural corollary to the fierce competitiveness of Kheda society, and goes some way to explain the inconsistencies observable in the politicization of the peasantry; it ought, therefore, form the starting point for any dispassionate analysis of the politics of the inter-war independence movement.

<sup>220</sup> Shah, *Caste Association and Political Process in Gujarat*, pp. 123 and 130-3. Shah claims that Patidars deliberately made Kshatriyas unwelcome in the Congress party, and that the first Kshatriya political meeting was organized in 1942 in opposition to the plans of Patidar nationalists to blow up railway lines and bridges.



Map 1: 'British Districts in Gujarat'.



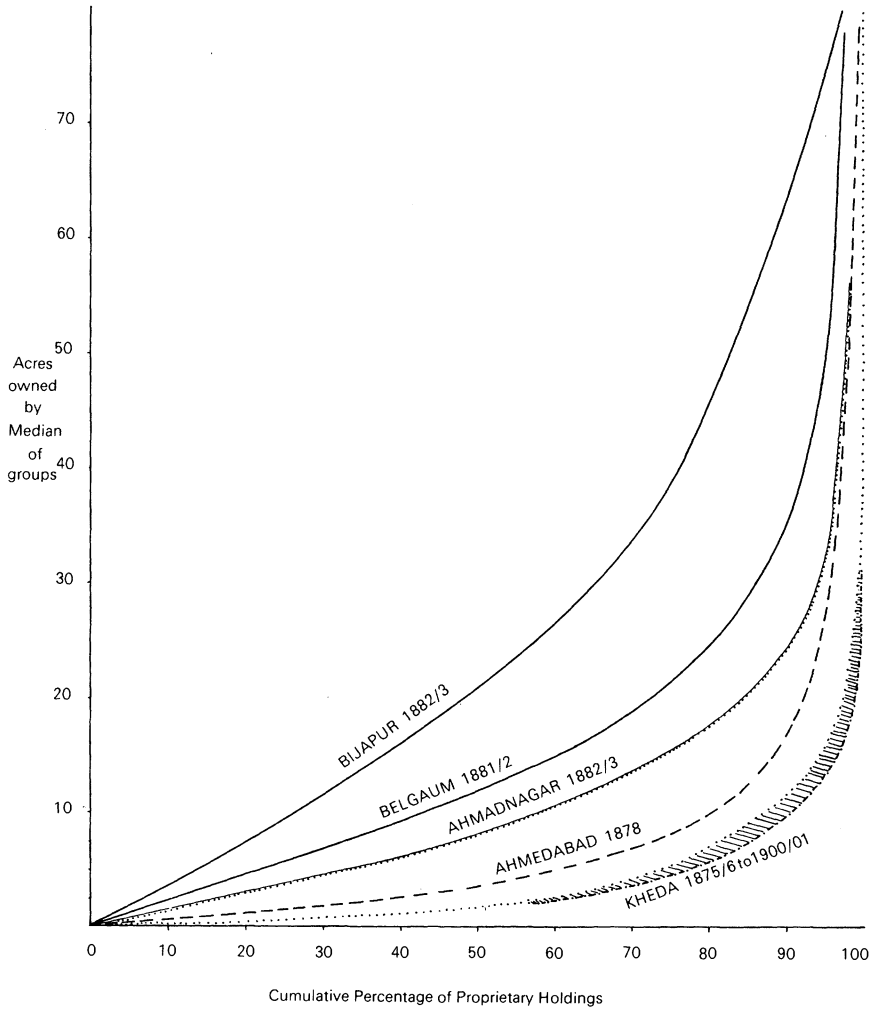
Map 2: 'Kheda District Showing Villages Mentioned in the Text'.

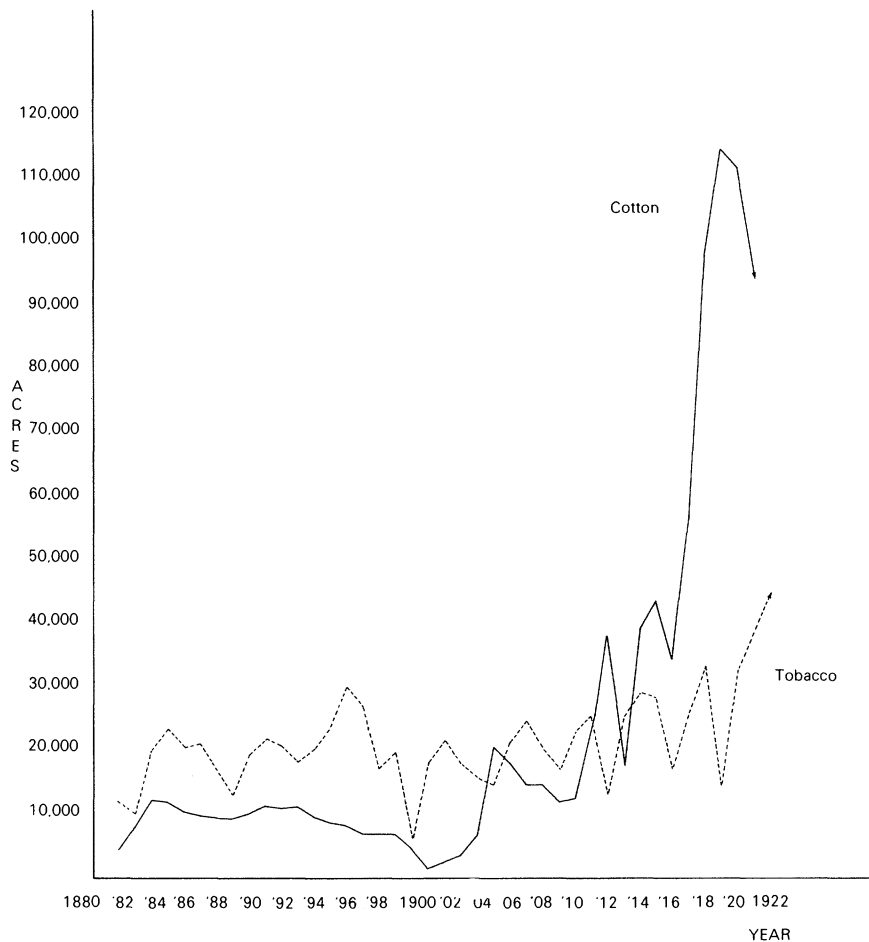


*Appendix I*

*Graph Illustrating the Approximate Size and Distribution of Proprietary Holdings in Kheda Compared with Other Districts in the Bombay Presidency*

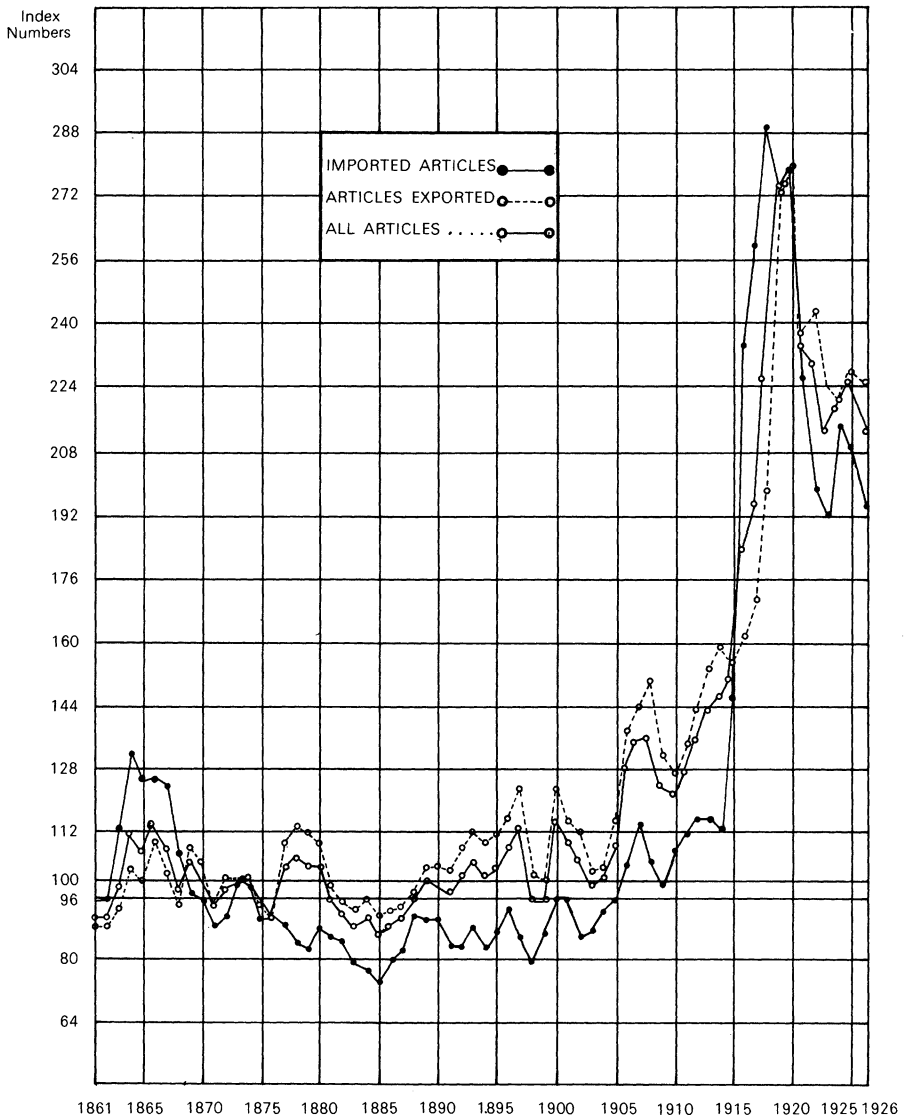
(From the district gazetteers and annual Jamabandi reports of the Bombay Presidency)



*Appendix II**Tobacco and Cotton Cultivation in the Kheda District (all talukas)*

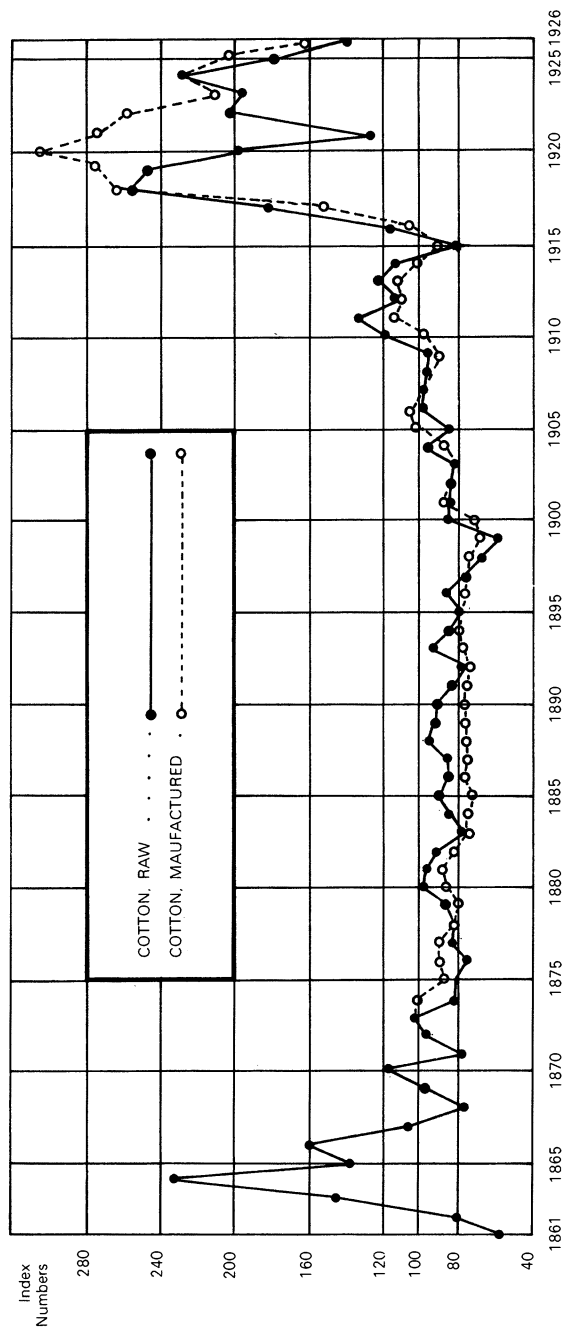
Source: Agricultural Statistics of British India and Bombay Presidency Annual Jambandi Reports.

*Index Numbers of Prices in India, 1861 to 1926 (Ordinary Method) All Articles*  
(Average Price of 1873 = 100)



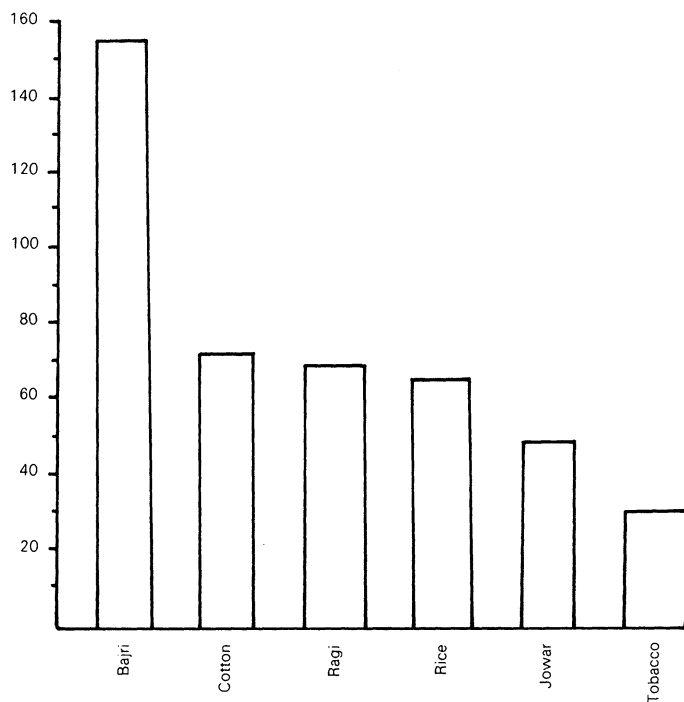
Dept. of Commercial Intelligence & Statistics, Govt. of India, 1928

*Index Numbers of Average Prices of Raw and Manufactured Cotton in India, 1861 to 1926*  
(Average Price of 1873 = 100)



Dept. of Commercial Intelligence & Statistics, Govt. of India, 1928

*Relative Area of Principal Crops Grown in the Kheda District (1925)*  
(in '000s of acres)



Source: Statistical Atlas of the Bombay Presidency, 1925